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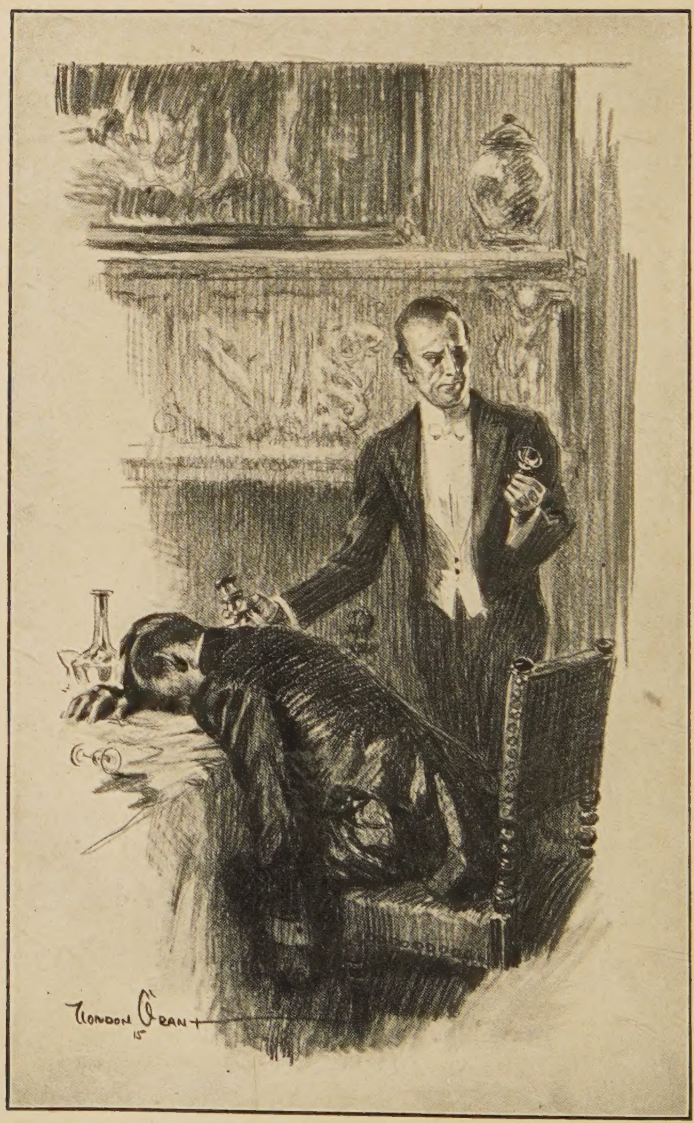
THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT



HE TOOK UP THE DECANTERS ONE BY ONE AND SAMPLED THEIR CONTENTS IN TURN

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THREE OWLS EDITION

THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

BY

THOMAS W. HANSHEW

Author of
"Cleek, the Man of the Forty Faces"
"Cleek of Scotland Yard"
Etc.

W. R. CALDWELL & CO.
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CHARACTERS

HAMILTON CLEEK, The Man of the Forty Faces and once known to the Police as "The Vanishing Cracksman," now the great Detective in his various disguises as Monsieur Georges de Lesparre, Philip Barch, George Headland.

SUPERINTENDENT NARKOM, of Scotland Yard.

LENNARD, his chauffeur.

HAMMOND, PETRIE } Detective Sergeants.

MELLISH, Police Officer.

DOLLOPS, Cleek's trusted assistant.

LORD ST. ULMER, the father of

LADY KATHERINE FORDHAM, who is in love with

GEOFFREY CLAVERING, the only son and heir of

SIR PHILIP CLAVERING, of Clavering Close, and

LADY CLAVERING, his second wife.

COUNT FRANZ DE LOUVISAN, found mysteriously murdered after having forced Lady Katherine to become engaged to him.

AILSA LORNE, Lady Katherine's friend and companion.

GENERAL and

MRS. RAYNOR, Lady Katherine's relatives.

HARRY RAYNOR, their son.

THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

CHAPTER ONE

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR

IT WAS half-past eleven on the night of Wednesday, April 14th, when the well-known red limousine of Mr. Maverick Narkom, superintendent of Scotland Yard, came abruptly to the head of Mulberry Lane, which, as you may possibly know, is a narrow road skirting one of the loneliest and wildest portions of Wimbledon Common.

Lennard, the chauffeur, put on the brake with such suddenness that the car seemed actually to rise from the earth, performed a sort of buzzing and snorting semicircle, and all but collided with the rear wall of Wuthering Grange before coming to a halt in the narrow road space which lay between that wall and the tree-fringed edge of the great Common.

Under ordinary circumstances one might as soon have expected to run foul of a specimen of the great auk rearing a family in St. Paul's churchyard, as to find Mr. Narkom's limousine in the neighbourhood of Mulberry Lane at any hour of the day or the night throughout the whole cycle of the year.

For a reason which will be made clear in the course of events, however, the superintendent had been persuaded to go considerably out of his way before returning to town after mingling duty with pleasure in taking part in the festivities attendant upon the coming of age of his friend Sir Philip Clavering's son and heir, and, incidentally, in seeing, too, that Petrie and Hammond, two of his sergeants, kept a watchful eye upon the famous Clavering service of gold plate which had been brought out of the bank vault for the occasion.

All three were sitting serenely back among the cushions of the limousine at the period when Lennard brought it to this abrupt and startling halt, the result of which was to fairly jerk them out of their seats and send them sprawling over one another in a struggling heap.

There was a moment of something like absolute confusion, for mist and darkness enveloped both the road and the Common, and none of the three could see anything from the windows of the car which might decide whether they had collided with some obstruction or were hovering upon the brink of some dangerous and unexpected pitfall.

Nor were their fears lessened by perceiving—through the glass screen—that Lennard had started up from his seat, and, with a hastily produced electric torch in one upraised hand, was leaning forward and wildly endeavouring to discern something through the all-enfolding mist. Mr. Narkom hastily unlatched the door and leaned out.

"What is it? What's gone wrong?" he inquired in the sharp staccato of excitement. "Anything amiss?"

"Lord, yessir! I heard a shot and a cry. A pistol shot . . . and a police whistle . . . and a cry of murder, sir. Up the lane ahead of us!" began Lennard, in a quaking voice; then he uttered a cry of fright, for, of a sudden, the darkness was riven by the screaming note of a police whistle—of two police whistles in fact: shrilling appeal and answer far up the lonely lane.

Hard on this came a man's voice shouting: "Head him off there, whoever you are! Don't let him get by you. Look sharp! He's making for the railway arch!"

"All right, mate. I'm here!" another male voice flung back. "He won't get past me, the blighter!"

Instantly there struck out the swift-measured sound of heavily shod feet racing at top speed up the mist-shrouded lane, and rapidly increasing the distance between the unseen runner and the standing limousine.

No need to tell either Narkom or his men that the man whose steps they heard was a constable, for there is a distinctive note, to ears that are trained, rung out by the heavy, cumbersome boots which folly accords to the British policeman.

Catching the ring of that telltale note now, Narkom shouted out at the top of his voice: "All right, Constable! Stick to him! Help coming!"

Then with a word of command to Lennard he pulled in his head, slammed the door, and the chauffeur, dropping back to his seat, threw open the clutch and sent the limousine bounding up the lane at a fifty-mile clip.

To-night, with the trees shadowing it and the mist crowding in, shoulder high, from the adjacent Common, the lane was a mere dark funnel; but to Lennard, whose boyhood had been passed within hailing distance of the place, it possessed no mysteries that the night or the vapour could hide.

He knew that it ran on for some seven or eight hundred feet, with the high brick wall which marked the rear boundary of Wuthering Grange on one side of it and straggling trees and matted gorse bushes shutting it in on the other, until it dipped down a steadily increasing incline, and ran straightway through an old brick-walled, brick-roofed arch of a long-abandoned Wimbledon Loop line.

Some two hundred feet upon the other side of this it divided into a sort of "Y," one branch swerving to the left forming a right of way across the meadows to the public highway, whilst the other struck out over the Common to the right, crossed Beverly Brook, and merged at length into the road which leads to Coombe Wood, and thence, through picturesque ways, to Kingston and the river.

The limousine took those seven or eight hundred feet between the head of the lane and the old railway arch at such a stupendous pace that it seemed to have

no more than started before the distance was eaten up and it came to halt again; but this time, in such a din and babel of struggling and shouting that Lennard seemed to have reached the very gateway of Sheol.

Narkom and his men were out of the vehicle almost as the brake fell into place, and clicking their electric pocket torches into sudden flame, rushed headlong into the black opening of the arch, into which they had taken but half a dozen steps, when they came upon a startling sight.

Snarling and yapping like a couple of fighting dogs and crying out in concert: "Got you, you blighter! Got you fast!" were two men, locked tight in each other's arms, reeling and swaying—one wearing the official badge of an appointed Common keeper, the other in the helmet and tunic of an ordinary constable.

"Lend a hand, gov'ner, for Gawd's sake!" rapped out the former. "Name's Mawson, sir—keeper on the Common—Number four, sir. Got the blackguard! Murder, sir—got him red handed!"

"Good Lord!" little more than gulped the man he held.

The two pairs of gripping hands dropped, the struggling figures fell apart, and the two men who but an instant before had been locked in an angry embrace stood staring at each other in open-mouthed amazement.

"What kind of a game is this?" demanded Nar-

kom, as with his allies he crowded forward. "You two people are paid to keep the peace, not to break it, dash you!"

"My word!" exclaimed the Common keeper, finding his voice suddenly. "A copper, is it?—a copper! when I thought . . . Gawd's truth, Constable, wot have you done with him? He run in here with me on his blessed heels. You didn't let him get past you, did you?"

"No fear!" snapped out the constable indignantly. "I stood here waiting—waiting and shouting to you—until you ran smack into my blessed arms; and if anybody but you come in *your* side of the arch, he never come out o' mine, I'll take my solemn oath!"

"Then where's he gone? Wot's become of him?" shouted the Common keeper excitedly. "I tell you I was on the very heels of him from the moment I first whistled and called out to you to head him off. I could a-most have touched him when he dashed in here; and—and his footsteps never stopped soundin' for one second the whole blessed time. Murder is wot he's done—murder!—and I've been on his heels from the very moment he fired the shot."

Narkom and his allies lost not an instant in revealing their identity and displaying their insignia of office to the two men.

"Murder is it, Keeper?" exclaimed the superintendent, remembering all at once what Lennard had said about hearing the cry and the shot. "When and how? Lead me to the body."

"Lor' bless you, sir, I aren't 'ad no time nor chanct to look after any body," replied the keeper. "All's I can tell you is that I was out there in my shelter on the Common when I heard the first cry—like as some one was callin' for help whiles some one else had 'em by the windpipe, sir; so I dashes out and cuts through the mist and gorse as fast as my blessed legs could carry me. Jist as I gets to the edge of the lane, sir, 'Bang!' goes a revolver shot jist 'arf a dozen feet in front of me, and a man, wot I couldn't see 'ide nor 'air of on account of the mist, nicks out o' somewheres, and cuts off down the lane like a blessed race 'orse. I outs with me whistle and blows it as 'ard as I could, and cuts off after him. He never stopped runnin' for a blessed instant. He never doubled on me, never turned to the right nor to the left, gov'ner, but jist dashes into this arch—straight in front of me, sir, and me running on almost within reachin' distance, until I runs smack into the arms of this constable here, and grabs *him*, thinkin' I'd got my man for sure. Wherever he's got to since, I tell you he come in here, sir—smack *in!*—and me after him; and if he didn't get past the constable——"

"He didn't—I've told you so once, and I'll stick to it!" interrupted the constable himself, with some show of heat. "What do you take me for—an old woman? Look here, Mr. Narkom, sir, my name's Mellish. It's true I've only been on the force a little over a week, sir, but my sergeant will tell you I've got my wits about me and aren't in the least likely

to let a man slip past me in the manner that this chap thinks. *Nothing* went past me—nothing the size of a cat, let alone a man, sir—and if the party in question really *did* come in here——"

"I'll soon settle that question!" rapped in Narkom sharply.

He flung a hurried command to Lennard, waved Petrie and Hammond aside, and an instant later the limousine moved swiftly up out of the mist until its bulk filled the entrance of the arch and its blazing acetylene lamps were sweeping it with light from end to end. Smooth as a rifle bore, its damp walls and curving roof shone out in the sudden glare—not a brick displaced, not a crevice big enough to shelter a rat much less a human being—and of the man the Common keeper had been chasing, not a sign nor a trace anywhere!

"Whatever the fellow did or wherever he went, he can't have gone far, so look sharp, my lads!" commanded Narkom. "If we're quick we're sure to nab him. Come along, Constable, come along, Keeper. Lennard, you stop where you are and guard the exit from the arch, so if he doubles on us he can't get by *you!*"

"Right you are, sir!" responded Lennard, as the superintendent and the four men made a dash toward that end of the arch through which the keeper was so positive the fugitive had come.

"I say, Mr. Narkom!" he added, raising his voice and shouting after them. "Eyes sharp to the left,

all of you, when you get outside this arch. Know the neighbourhood like a book, sir. Lane forks out into a 'Y' after you get about fifty yards on. Branches off on the left where there's an old house called Gleer Cottage, sir, that hasn't been tenanted for years and years. Walled garden—tool house—stable. Great place for man to hide, sir!"

"Good boy! Thanks!" flung back Narkom. "Come on, my lads! Lively!"

Then they swung out of the arch with a rush, and the last that Lennard saw of them before the shrouding mist took them and blotted them from his view, they were pelting up the lane at top speed and making headlong for the branching "Y" to which he had directed them, their footsteps sounding on the moist surface of the road and their electric torches emitting every now and again a spark like a glowworm flashing.

Five minutes passed—the click of their flying steps had dropped off into silence; the flash of their torches had vanished in the distance and the mist; even the blurred sound of their excited voices was stilled; and neither ear nor eye could now detect anything but the soft drip of the moisture from the roof of the arch and the white oblivion of the close-pressing, ever-thickening mist.

Still he sat there, waiting—alert, watchful, keen—looking straight before him and keeping a close watch on the unobstructed end of the miniature tunnel whose entire length was still flooded with the glare

from the motor's lamps. If a mouse had crawled down its damp walls he must have seen it; if even so much as a shadow had come up out of that wilderness of mist and crept into the place, he must have detected it. But there was nothing; neither man nor beast, neither shade nor shadow; only the loneliness and the mist and the soft "plick-plick!" of the dropping moisture.

The five minutes became eight, ten, a dozen, without the slightest change in anything. Then, all of a sudden, Lennard's tense nerves gave a sort of jump and a swift prickle flashed up his spine and through his hair. A sound had come—a rustle—a step—a movement. Not from the direction in which he was looking, however, but from the lane beyond the arch and *behind* the limousine.

He jumped to his feet and rising on tiptoe on his driver's seat flashed the light of his electric torch back over the top of the vehicle; what he saw took all the breath out of him and set his heart and pulses hammering furiously.

Against that thick blanket of mist the penetrating power of the torch's gleam was so effectually blunted that it could do nothing more than throw a pale, weak circle of light a few feet into the depths of a crowding vapour, leaving all beyond and upon either side doubly dark in contrast.

Yet as the light streamed out and flung that circle into the impinging mist, there moved across it the figure of a woman, young and fair, with a scarf of

lace thrown over her head, from beneath which fell a glory of unbound hair, thick and lustrous, over shoulders that were wrapped in ermine—ermine in mid-April!

A woman! Here! At this hour! In this time of violence and evil doing! The thing was so uncanny, so unnatural, so startlingly unexpected, that Lennard's head swam.

She was gone so soon—just glimmering across the circle of light and then vanishing into the mist as suddenly as she had appeared—that for a moment or two he lost his nerve and his wits, and ducked down under the screen of the motor's top, remembering all the tales he had ever heard of ghosts and apparitions, and, in a moment of folly, half believing he had looked upon one. But of a sudden his better sense asserted itself, and realizing that for a woman—*any* woman, no matter how dressed, no matter how young and fair and good to look upon—to be moving stealthily about this place, at this hour, when there was talk of murder, was at least suspicious, he laid hands upon the wheel, and being unable to turn the vehicle in the arch and go after *her*, put on full power and went after Narkom and his men. A swift whizz carried him through the arch and up the lane, and, once in the open, he laid hand upon the bulb of the motor horn and sent blast after blast hooting through the stillness, shouting at the top of his voice as he scorched over the ground:

"Mr. Narkom! Mr. Narkom! This way, sir, this way! This way!"

CHAPTER TWO

HOW THE CHASE ENDED

MEANWHILE Mr. Narkom and his zealous assistants had rushed wildly on, coming forth at last from the old railway arch into the narrow lane without so much as catching a glimpse or finding the slightest trace of either victim or murderer.

But that they had not all been deceived by an hallucination of the night, received proof from the triumphant discovery of Sergeant Petrie, who, with the aid of his torch and the bull's-eye lantern of Constable Mellish, had found the unmistakable traces of hurried footsteps on the soft, yielding earth.

"Lummy, sir! the place is alive with 'em," ejaculated Mellish. "This is the way he went, sir, down this 'ere lane, and makin' for the right of way across the fields, like wot that shuvver of yours said, sir."

Narkom, Hammond, and Petrie were at his side before he had finished speaking. It was true, other footprints were there, all the lonely tree-girt road was full of them, going down the centre in one long, unbroken line. They stopped but a moment to make sure of this, then rose and dashed on in the direction which they led.

Straight on, down the middle of the thoroughfare, without break or interruption, the foot-made trail drew them; under dripping overshadowing trees; by natural hedges and unnatural mounds where weeds and briars scrambled over piles of débris, and the light of their torches showed Narkom and his men the dim irregular outlines of a crumbling wall, green with moss and lichen and higher in parts than a man's head.

On and still on, the deeply dug footprints lessening not a whit in their clearness, until, all of a moment, they swerved slightly to the left and then abruptly stopped —stopped dead short, and after that were seen no more!

"Here's where he went!" called out Hammond, pointing to the left as Narkom and the others, in a sort of panic, went running round and endeavouring to pick up the lost trail. "Look, sir—grass here and the wall beyond. Hopped over on to the grass, that's what he did, then scaled the wall and 'went to earth' like an idiot in that old house Lennard told us of. Come along—quick!

"Fair copped him, sir, as sure as eggs," he added excitedly, plunging in through the mist and the shadow of the trees until he came to the wall in question. "Break in the wall here, coping gone, dry dust of newly crumbled mortar on the grass. Got over here, Mr. Narkom—yes, and cut himself doing it. Hand, most likely; for there are bits of mortar with broken glass stuck in 'em lying about and a drop of fresh blood on the top of the wall!"

A single look was enough, when Mr. Narkom came

hurrying to his side, to verify all that had been said; and with an excited, "This way, all of you. Look sharp!" the superintendent sprang up, gripped the broken top of the wall, scrambled over it and dropped down into the darkness and mist upon the other side. The others followed his lead, and the next moment all were in the dark, walled-in enclosure in the middle of which the long-abandoned house known as Gleer Cottage stood. They could see nothing of it from where they were, for the mist and the crowded screen of long-neglected fruit trees shut it in as with a curtain.

"Better let me go ahead and light the way, gents," said Constable Mellish in an excited whisper, as he again unshuttered his bull's-eye and directed its gleam upon the matted and tangled verdure. "Stout boots and thick trousers is what's wanted to tramp a path through these briars; them evening clothes of yours 'ud be torn to ribbons and your ankles cut to the bone before you'd gone a dozen yards. Lummy! there's another of his footprints—on the edge of that flower bed there! see! Come on, come on—quick!"

Too excited and too much occupied with the work in hand to care who took the lead so that they got through the place and ran their quarry to earth, Narkom and the rest suffered the suburban constable to beat a way for them through the brambly wilderness, while with bodies bent, nerves tense as wire, treading on tiptoe along the trail that was being so cautiously blazed for them, they pressed on after him.

Suddenly, without hint or warning, a faint metallic

"click" sounded, the light they were following went suddenly out, and before Narkom, realizing that Mellish had sprung the shutter over the flame of his lamp, could voice a whispered inquiry, the constable's body lurched back against his own and a shaking hand descended upon his shoulder.

"Don't move, don't speak, sir!" said Mellish's voice close to his ear. "We've got him right enough. He's in the house itself, and with a light! There's a board or something put up against the window to shield it, but you can see the light through the chinks—coming and going, sir, like as he was carrying it about."

Startling as the statement was, when Narkom and the rest came on tiptoe to the end of the trampled path and peeped around the last screening bush into the open beyond, they found it to be the case.

Blurred, shadowy, mist wrapped—like the ghost of a house set in a ghostly garden—there stood the long-abandoned building, its blank upper windows lost in the wrapping fog; its dreary face toward the distant road; its bleak, unlovely side fronting the point from which Narkom and his men now viewed it; and from one of the two side windows thin wavering lines of constantly shifting light issued from beneath the shadow of a veranda.

"Candlelight, sir, and a draught somewhere, nobody moving about," whispered Hammond. "Window or a door open—that's what makes the light rise and fall. What an ass! Barricaded the window and never thought to stop up the chinks. Lord, for a

fellow clever enough to get away from the constable and the keeper in the manner he did, you'd never look for an idiot's trick like this."

Narkom might have reminded him that it was an old, old failing on the part of the criminal class, this overlooking some trifling little point after a deed of almost diabolical cunning; but at present he was too much excited to think of anything but getting into that lighted room and nabbing his man before he slipped the leash again and escaped him.

Ducking down he led a swift but soundless flight across the open space until he and his allies were close up under the shadow of the building itself, where he made the rather surprising discovery that the rear door was unlocked. Through this they made their way down a passage, at the end of which was evidently the room they sought, for a tiny thread of light lay between the door and the bare boards of the passage. Here they halted a moment, their nerves strung to breaking point and their hearts hammering thickly as they now heard a faint rustling movement and a noise of tearing paper sounding from behind it.

For a moment these things alone were audible; then Narkom's hand shot upward as a silent signal; there was a concerted movement, a crash that carried a broken door inward and sent echoes bellowing and bounding from landing to landing and wall to wall, a gush of light, a scramble of crowding figures, a chorus of excited voices, and—the men of Scotland Yard were in the room.

But no cornered criminal rose to do battle with them, and no startled outcry greeted their coming—nothing but the squeal and scamper of frightened rats bolting to safety behind the wainscot; a mere ripple of sound, and after it a silence which even the intruders had not breath enough to break with any spoken word.

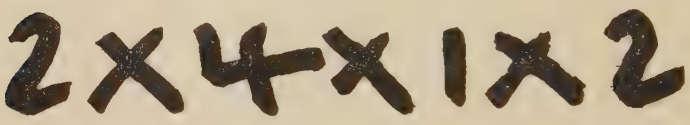
With peeling walls and mouldering floor the long, low-ceiled room gaped out before them, littered with fallen plaster and thick with dust and cobwebs. On the floor, in the blank space between the two boarded-up windows, a pair of lighted candles guttered and flared, while behind them, with arms outstretched, sleeves spiked to the wall—a human crucifix, with lolling head and bended knees—a dead man hung, and the light shining upon his distorted face revealed the hideous fact that he had been strangled to death.

However many his years, they could not have totalled more than five and thirty at most, and ghastly as he was now, in life he must have been strikingly handsome: fair of hair and moustache, lean of loin and broad of shoulder, and with that subtle *something* about him which mutely stands sponsor for the thing called birth.

He was clad in a long gray topcoat of fine texture and fashionable cut—a coat unbuttoned and flung open by the same furious hand which had rent and torn at the suit of evening clothes he wore beneath.

The waistcoat was wrenched apart and a snapped watch chain dangled from it, and on the broad ex-

panse of shirt bosom thus exposed there was rudely smeared in thick black letters—as if a finger had been dipped for the purpose in blacking or axle grease—a string of mystifying numerals running thus:



For a moment the men who had stumbled upon this appalling sight stood staring at it in horrified silence; then Constable Mellish backed shudderingly away and voiced the first spoken word.

"The Lord deliver us!" he said in a quaking whisper. "*Not* the murderer himself, but the party as he murdered! A gent—a swell—strangled in a place like this! Gawd help us! what was a man like that a-doing of here? And besides, the shot was fired out there—on the Common—as you know yourselves. You heard it, didn't you?"

Nobody answered him. For Narkom and his men this horrifying discovery possessed more startling, more mystifying, more appalling surprises than that which lay in the mere finding of the victim of a tragedy where they had been confident of running to earth the assassin alone. For in that ghastly dead thing spiked to the crumbling wall they saw again a man who less than four hours ago had stood before them in the full flower of health and strength and life.

"Good God!" gasped Hammond, laying a shaking

hand upon Narkom's arm. "You see who it is, don't you, sir? It's the Austrian gent who was at Clavering Close to-night—Count Whats-his-name!"

"De Louvisan—Count Franz de Louvisan," supplied Narkom agitatedly. "The last man in the world who *should* have shown himself in the home of the man whose sweetheart he was taking away, despite the lady's own desires and entreaties! And to come to such an end—to-night—in such a place as this—after such an interview with the two people whose lives he was wrecking . . . Good God!"

A thought almost too horrible to put into words lay behind that last excited exclamation, for his eyes had fallen on a thin catgut halter—a violoncello string—thus snatched from its innocent purpose, and through his mind had floated the strains of the music with which Lady Katharine Fordham had amused the company but a short time before. He turned abruptly to his men and had just opened his mouth to issue a command when the darkness and silence without were riven suddenly by the hooting of a motor horn and the voice of Lennard shouting.

"Stop!" commanded Narkom, as the men made an excited step toward the door. "Search this house—guard it—don't let any one enter or leave it until I come back. If any living man comes near it, arrest him, no matter who or what he is. But don't leave the place unguarded for a single instant—remember that. There's only one man in the world for this affair. Stop where you are until I return with him."

Then he flung himself out of the room, out of the house, and ran as fast as he could fly in the direction of the tooting horn. At the point where the branching arm of the "Y" joined the main portion of Mulberry Lane, he caught sight of two huge, glaring motor lamps coming toward him through the mist and darkness. In a twinkling the limousine had halted in front of him, and Lennard was telling excitedly of that startling experience back there by the old railway arch.

"A woman, sir—a young and beautiful woman! And she must have had something to do with this night's business, gov'ner, or why should she be wandering about this place at such a time? Hop in quick, sir, and I'll run you back to the spot where I saw her."

At any other time, under any other circumstances, Narkom might, probably would, have complied with that request; but now—— A woman indeed! No woman's hand could have nailed that grim figure to the wall of Gleer Cottage, at least not alone, not without assistance. This he realized; and brushing the suggestion aside, jumped into the limousine and slammed the door upon himself.

"Drive to Clarges Street! I must see Cleek! Full speed now! Don't let the devil himself stop you!" he cried; and in a moment they were bounding away townward at a fifty-mile clip that ate up the distance like a cat lapping cream.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SHADOW THAT LAY BEHIND

IT HAD but just gone midnight when the car slowed down before the house in Clarges Street. Here in company with his faithful henchman, Dollops, and attended upon by an elderly housekeeper and a deaf-and-dumb maid of all work, there dwelt—under the name and guise of "Captain Horatio Burbage," a superannuated seaman—that strange and original genius who chose to call himself "Hamilton Cleek," but who was known to the police of two continents by the sobriquet of "The Man of the Forty Faces."

In the merest fraction of a minute Narkom was out of the limousine, had crossed the narrow pavement, mounted the three shallow steps, and was standing in the shadow of a pillared porch, punching a signal on the button of an electric bell. In all he could not have been kept waiting more than a minute, but it seemed forty times that length when he at last heard a bolt slip, and saw, in the gap of the open door, the figure of a slim, red-headed youth arrayed in a bed quilt, a suit of pink flannelette pajamas, and a pair of white canvas tennis shoes.

"Come in, sir, come in quick!" this young man

whispered, in the broadest of Cockney accents, as he opened the door just wide enough for Narkom to sidle into the semi-dark passage.

"Where's your master, Dollops?" put in the superintendent. "Speak up! Is he in? I've got to see him at once!"

The voice which answered came, not from Dollops, but from the dark top of the dim staircase.

"Come up, Mr. Narkom," it said. "I thought that young beggar had gone to bed ages ago and was just coming down myself to let you in. Come along up. You know the way."

Narkom acted upon the invitation so promptly that he was up the stairs and in the cozy, curtained, and lamp-lit room which Cleek called his den almost as quickly as his host himself. In fact, Cleek had scarcely time to sweep into the drawer of his writing table a little pile of something which looked like a collection of odds and ends of jewellery, bits of faded ribbon, and time-stained letters, and turn the key upon them, before the police official was at the door.

"Hullo!" said Cleek in a tone of surprise and deep interest as the superintendent came fairly lurching into the room. "What's in the wind, Mr. Narkom? You look fairly bowled. Whisky and soda there—at your elbow—help yourself. I presume it is a case—nothing else would bring you here at this time and in such a state. What kind is it? And for whom? Some friend of yours or for the Yard?"

"For both, I'm afraid," replied Narkom, pouring

out a stiff peg of whisky and nervously gulping it down between words. "God knows I hope it may be only for the Yard, but considering what I know—— Get your hat and coat. Come with me at once, Cleek. It's a murder—a mystery after your own heart. Lennard's below with the limousine. Come quickly, do, there's a dear chap. I'll tell you all about it on the way. The thing's only just been done—within the hour—out Wimbledon way."

"I might have guessed that, Mr. Narkom, considering that you were to mingle duty with pleasure and spend the evening at Wimbledon with your old friend, Sir Philip Clavering," replied Cleek, rising at once. "Certainly I will go with you. Did you ever know the time when I wouldn't do all that I could to help the best friend I ever had—yourself? And if it is, as you hint, likely to be in the interest of the friend of *my* friend——"

"I'm not so sure of that, Cleek. God knows I hope it's a mistaken idea of mine; but when you have heard, when you have seen, how abominably things point to that dear boy of Clavering's and to the girl that dead fellow was conspiring with her father to take away from him——"

"Oho!" interjected Cleek, with a strong rising inflection. "So there is that element in the case, eh?—love and a woman in distress! Give me a minute to throw a few things together and I am with you, my friend."

"Thanks, old chap, I knew I could rely upon you!

But don't stop to bother about a disguise, Cleek, it's too dark for anybody to see that it isn't 'the Captain' that's going out; and besides, there's everything of that sort in the limousine, you know. The street is as dark as a pocket, and there's nobody likely to be on the watch at this hour."

The curious one-sided smile so characteristic of the man looped up the corner of Cleek's mouth; his features seemed to writhe, a strange, indefinable change to come over them as he put into operation his peculiar birth gift; and an instant later, but that he had not stirred one step and his clothing was still the same, one might have thought that a totally different man was in the room.

"Will it matter *who* watches?" he said, with just a suspicion of vanity over the achievement. "It will be—let us see—yes, a French gentleman whom we shall call 'Monsieur Georges de Lesparre' to-night, Mr. Narkom. A French gentleman with a penchant for investigating criminal affairs, and who comes to you with the strong recommendation of the Parisian police department. Now cut down to the limousine and wait for me, I'll join you presently. And, Mr. Narkom?"

"Yes, old chap?"

"As you go out, give Dollops directions where and how to get to the scene of the tragedy, and tell him to follow us in a taxi as expeditiously as possible."

"Oh, Molly 'Awkins! There ain't no rest for the wicked and no feedin' for the 'ungry this side of

Kensal Green—and precious little on the other!" sighed Dollops when he received this message. "Not four weeks it ain't since I was drug off in the middle of my lunch to go Cingalee huntin' in Soho for them bounders wot was after Lady Chepstow's 'Sacred Son,' and now here I am pulled out of my blessed pajamas in the middle of the night to go 'Tickle Tootsying' in the bally fog at Wimbledon! Well, all right, sir. Where the gov'ner goes, I goes, bless his 'eart; so you can look for me as soon as I can get out of these Eytalian pants."

Narkom made no comment; merely went down and out to the waiting limousine and took his seat in it, full of a racking, nervous impatience that was like a consuming fire; and there Cleek found him, ten minutes later, when he jumped in with his kit bag and gave the signal which set Lennard to speeding the car back on its way to the scene of the mysterious tragedy.

"Pull down the blinds and turn up the light, Mr. Narkom, so I can make a few necessary changes on the way," he said, opening the locker and groping round in the depths of it as the limousine scudded around the corner and tore off up Picadilly. "You can give me the particulars of the case while I'm making up. Come on—let's have them. How did the affair begin, and where?"

Narkom detailed the occurrences of the night with the utmost clearness, from the moment when the shot and the cry attracted Lennard's attention to

that when the ghastly discovery was made in the semi-ruined cottage.

"Oho!" said Cleek, with one of his curious smiles. "So our friend the mysterious assassin disappeared in the middle of a sort of tunnel did he—and with a man at either end? Hum-m-m! I see, I see!"

"Do you? Well, I'm blest if I do, then. There wasn't a place as big as your hand to hide anything in, much less shelter a man; and the fellow who could do a diabolical thing like that——"

"That is a question which simply remains to be seen," interposed Cleek. "The thing is not so supernatural as it appears at first blush. Once—in the days that lie behind me, when I was the hunted and not the hunter—in that old 'Vanishing Cracksman' time of mine, I myself did that 'amazing disappearance' twice. Once in an alley in New York when there was a night watchman and a patrolman to be eluded; and once in Paris when, with Margot's lot, I was being hunted into a trap which would have been the end of one of the biggest coups of my career had I been nabbed that night."

"Margot?" repeated Narkom. "Yes, I remember the Queen of the Apaches—the woman with whom you used to consort. Said she'd get even with you when you turned down the old life and took sides with the law instead of against it, I recollect. And you tell me that in those old days you practised a trick such as this fellow did to-night?"

"Yes. Beat him at it—if you will pardon the

conceit—for I vanished in the middle of a narrow passage with a sergeant de ville chasing me at one end and a concierge accompanied by a cabman and a commissionaire racing in at the other. I always fancied that that trick was original with me. I know of no one but Margot and her crew who were aware of the exploit, and if any man has borrowed a leaf from the book of those old times—— Oh, well, it will be the end of all your fears regarding any friend of yours, Mr. Narkom, for the fellow will stand convicted as a member of the criminal classes and, possibly, of Margot's crew. We shall know the truth of that when we get to the scene of this mysterious vanishment, my friend."

"Yes, but how was it done, Cleek? Where did he go? How did he elude the chasing keeper and the waiting constable? A man can't vanish into thin air, and I tell you there wasn't a place of any sort for him to hide in. Yet you speak of the trick as if it were easy."

"It *is* easy, provided he had the same cause and adopted the same means as I did, my friend. Wait until we come to investigate that railway arch and you will see. Now tell me something, Mr. Narkom: How came you to be in the neighbourhood of Mulberry Lane at all to-night? It is nowhere near Clavering Close; and it was decidedly out of your way if, as you tell me, you were on the way back to town. It is peculiar that you should have chosen to go out of your way like that."

"I didn't choose to do it. As a matter of fact I was executing a commission for Lady Clavering. It appears that a jewel had been found by the maid-in-attendance lying upon the floor of the ladies' room, and as Lady Clavering recollected seeing that jewel upon Miss Ailsa Lorne's person to-night, she asked me to stop at Wuthering Grange and return it to her."

"Ailsa Lorne!" A light flashed into Cleek's face as he repeated the name, and rising into his eyes, made them positively radiant. "Ailsa Lorne, Mr. Narkom? You surely do not mean to tell me that Ailsa Lorne is in Wimbledon?"

"Yes, certainly I do. My dear fellow, how the name seems to interest you. But I remember: you know the lady, of course."

Know her? Know the woman whose eyes had lit the way back from those old days of crime to the higher and the better things, the woman who had been his redemption in this world, and would, perhaps, be his salvation in the one to come? Cleek's very soul sang hymns of glory at the bare thought of her.

"I did not know Miss Lorne would be in Wimbledon," he said quietly, "or anywhere in the neighbourhood of London. I thought she had accepted a temporary position down in Suffolk as the companion of an old school friend, Lady Katharine Fordham."

"So she did," replied Narkom. "And it is as that unhappy young lady's companion that she was at

Clavering Close to-night. Lady Katharine, as you doubtless know, is Lord St. Ulmer's only child."

"Lord St. Ulmer?" repeated Cleek, gathering up his brows thoughtfully. "Hum-m-m! Ah-h-h! I seem to remember something about a Lord St. Ulmer. Let me see! Lost his wife when his daughter was a mere baby, didn't he, and took the loss so much to heart that he went out to Argentina and left the girl to the care of an aunt? Yes, I recall it now. Story was in all the papers some months ago. Got hold of a silver mine out there; made a pot of money, and came home after something like fifteen years of absence; bought in the old family place, Ulmer Court, down in Suffolk, after it had been in the hands of strangers for a generation or two, and took his daughter down there to live. That's the man, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's the man. He's worth something like half a million sterling to-day—lucky beggar."

"Then why do you allude to his daughter and heiress as an 'unhappy young lady'? Surely with unlimited wealth at her command——"

"Which I dare say she would gladly give up to get back other things that she has lost," interposed Mr. Narkom. "Her hopes of becoming young Geoff Clavering's wife for one!"

"Young Geoff Clavering? The chap whose coming of age was celebrated to-day?"

"Yes, the son and heir of my friend, Sir Philip Clavering, as fine a boy as ever stood in shoe leather.

He and Lady Katharine have almost grown up together, as her uncle and aunt, General and Mrs. Raynor, are close neighbours at Wuthering Grange. They were engaged at seventeen, a regular idyllic love match, old chap. Sir Philip and Lady Clavering were immensely fond of her and heartily approved the match. So apparently did her father, to whom she wrote, although she had not seen him since she was a baby. Even when he returned to England with a fortune big enough to warrant his daughter wedding a duke, he still appeared to approve of the engagement, and suggested that the wedding should be celebrated on the young man's twenty-first birthday."

"Which, as to-day is that day, and you still speak of her as Lady Katharine Fordham, I presume did not take place?"

"No, it did not. Some three months ago, a certain Count de Louvisan, an Austrian, appeared on the scene, claiming acquaintance with St. Ulmer; and it seems that after a subsequent interview, Lord St. Ulmer informed his daughter that her engagement with Geoff Clavering must come to an end, and that it was her father's intention that she should become the wife of Count de Louvisan."

"Oho!" said Cleek, in two different tones. "All of which goes to suggest that the count had some hold over the old gentleman and was using it to feather his own nest. Of course the girl couldn't be compelled to marry the man against her will, so if she

consented to the breaking of the engagement—— Did she?"

"Yes."

"Then something must have been told her—something which was either a lie or an appalling truth—to make her take a step like that, for a woman does not break with the man she loves unless something more than life is at stake. And it is this Count de Louvisan, you tell me, that has been murdered? Hum-m-m!"

"Yes, the worst of it is," said Mr. Narkom gloomily, "there was a scene between him and young Clavering but a couple of hours before the murder was discovered."

"What's that?" rapped out Cleek. "A 'scene'! A quarrel do you mean? How and where? Or perhaps you don't know?"

"As it happens, I do," said Narkom, "for I happened to be at Clavering Close when it took place. You see, Lord St. Ulmer is laid up with a sprained ankle at Wuthering Grange, where he has been staying with his sister and brother-in-law, the Raynors. Lady Katharine seized the opportunity to say farewell to Geoff, and came over at about eight o'clock; and I hope, Cleek, I may never in my life again see anything so heartbreaking as was made those last few minutes of parting."

"Few? Why few, pray?"

"Because they had not been together half an hour when the Count de Louvisan came over, posthaste,

after his fiancée. Lady Katharine's absence had been discovered from the Grange, and naturally he was the one who would come after her. You can guess what followed, Cleek. Young Clavering fairly flew at the fellow, and would have thrashed him but that his father and I got hold of him, and Hammond and Petrie hustled the count out of the room. But even so, nobody could prevent that wild, impetuous, excited boy from challenging the man, then and there. To that the count merely threw back a laugh and said, as Petrie and Hammond hustled him out of the room: 'Monsieur, one does not fight a fallen foe—one merely pities him!' And it took all his father's strength and mine to hold the boy in check. 'Pity yourself if ever I meet you!' he shouted. 'There'll be one blackguard the less in the world if ever I come within reach of you again, damn you! I had nine years of hope until you came, and I'll put a mark on you for every one of them that you've spoilt!'"

"'A mark'!" repeated Cleek, with some slight show of agitation. "A mark for every year? It is true that the barking dog is the last to bite but—— What were those figures that you tell me were smeared on the dead man's shirt bosom—2–4–1–2, were they not? And that sum equals nine!"

"Yes," said Narkom, with a sort of groan. "Just nine, Cleek, just exactly nine. That's what cut the heart out of me when I saw that dead man spiked to the cottage wall, bearing the very mark he had sworn that he should bear."

"I see," murmured Cleek thoughtfully. "Of course, the wisest of men are sometimes mistaken, but somehow I took those numerals to stand for a sign of a secret society; but, as you say, the numbers do indeed total nine—the years of young Clavering's threat, but——"

His voice trailed off; he sat for a moment deep in thought.

"Then there is the 'spike,' that is an old Apache punishment. They spiked Lanisterre to the wall when he went over to the police. Which is it? The Apaches or this foolish, hot-headed boy lover?"

Narkom wisely refrained from comment. He knew the ways and methods of his famous ally only too well, and he sat silent therefore till Lennard pulled up the limousine sharply in front of Gleer Cottage.

"Here we are at the cottage—unless you would like to see the arch first?"

"Oh, no," Cleek smiled softly. "That part of the mystery, my friend, is quite simple. Lead the way, please."

They alighted without further remark, and Narkom was followed by as complete a specimen of a French dandy as could be found in Paris, from the gardens of the Tuileries to the benches of the Luxembourg.

CHAPTER FOUR

CLEWS AND SUSPICIONS

A MINUTE more and Cleek was in the house —in the presence of Hammond and Petrie— and Narkom had introduced him as "Monsieur Georges de Lesparre, a distinguished French criminologist who had come over to England this morning upon a matter connected with the French Police Department and who, in the absence of Mr. Cleek, had consented to take up this peculiar case."

"My hat! Wouldn't that drive you to drink!" commented Petrie in a disgusted aside as he eyed this suave and sallow gentleman with open disapproval. "What will we be importing from the continent next, Hammond? As if there aren't detectives in England good enough to do the Yard's work without setting them to twiddling their blessed thumbs whilst a blooming Froggie runs the show and—beg pardon! what's that? Yes, Mr. Narkom. Searched the house from top to bottom, sir. Nobody in it, and nobody been here either, sir, not a soul since you left."

"You are quite sure, monsieur?" This from Cleek. "About the 'nobody in the house,' I mean, of course. You are quite sure?"

"Of course we're sure!" snapped Hammond savagely. "Been from the top to the bottom of it—me and Petrie and the constable here—and not a soul in it anywhere."

"Ah, the constable, eh? You shall tell me, please, Mr. Narkom, is this the constable who was at the one end of the arch while the keeper was chasing the man in at the other? Ah, it is, eh? Well—er—shall not we see the keeper, too? I do not find him about and I should much like to speak with him. Where is he?"

"Who—the keeper?" said Narkom. "Blest if I know. Is he about, my lads?"

"No, sir. Ain't *been* about—has he, Petrie?—for the Lord knows how long. Never thought of the beggar until this moment, sir."

"Nor did I," said Narkom. "Come to think of it, I haven't seen the fellow since we came to the 'Y' of the road and found those footprints leading here. No doubt he has gone back to his shelter on the Common and—— Monsieur! Why are you smiling? Good God! you—I—— Monsieur, shall I send my men for the fellow? Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, Monsieur Narkom, I want to see him very, very much indeed—if you can find him! But you can't, monsieur; and I fear me that you never will. What you will find, however, if you will send your men to the shelter of which you speak will be the *real* keeper, either dead or stunned or gagged, and his coat and hat and badge removed from his body by the man who personated him."

"Good heavens above, man, you don't mean to say——"

"That you had the real criminal in your hands and let him go, that you talked with him, walked with him, were taken in by him, and that he told you no lie when he said the assassin really *did* run into the arch," replied Cleek quietly. "It is the old old trick of that fellow who was called the 'Vanishing Cracksman,' my friend: to knock down the fellow who first gives the alarm, rip off his clothing, and then to lead the hue and cry until there's a chance to steal away unobserved. Send your men to the keeper's shelter and see if I have guessed the truth of that little riddle or not. I'll lay you a sovereign, my friend, that your man has slipped the leash, and it will be but a fluke of fate if you ever lay hands on him again."

In a sort of panic Narkom turned to his men and sent them flying from the house to investigate this startling assertion; and, turning as they went, Cleek walked into the room where that awful dead figure hung. He had taken but one step across the threshold, however, when he stopped suddenly and began to sniff the air—less to the surprise of Narkom, who had often seen him do this sort of thing before, than to Constable Mellish, who stood looking at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"Good lud, man—I should say, monsieur," exclaimed the superintendent agitatedly, "after what you have just hinted, my head is in a whirl and I am prepared for almost anything; but surely you cannot

find anything suspicious in the mere atmosphere of the place?"

"No; nothing but what you yourself must have observed. There is a distinct odour of violets in the room; so that unless that unhappy man yonder was of the kind that scents itself, we may set it down that a woman has been in here."

"A woman? But no woman could do a thing like that," pointing to the position of the dead man. "Nor," after sniffing the air repeatedly, "do I notice anything of the odour which you speak."

"Nor me nuther, sir," put in the constable.

"Still, the odour is here," returned Cleek. "And —no! it does not emanate from the dead man. There is scent on him to be sure, but it is not the scent of violets. Odours last at best but a little time after the person bearing them has left the room, and as it must now be upward of an hour since the discovery of the crime——"

Cleek sucked in his upper lip and took his chin between his thumb and forefinger and pinched it hard. What was that that Narkom had told him regarding Lennard's startling experience after he had been left on guard at the old railway arch? Hum-m-m! Certainly there was *one* woman abroad in this neighbourhood to-night, and a woman decidedly *not* of the lower classes at that, as witness the fact that she had worn an ermine cloak. Certainly, that would point to the wearer being a woman to whom money was no object —and to Lady Katharine Fordham, with all the great

St. Ulmer wealth behind her, it assuredly was not. Clearly, then, whoever was or was not the actual perpetrator of this night's crime, a woman of the higher walk of life—a rich and fashionable woman, in fact—was in some way connected with it.

The question was, did Lady Katharine Fordham possess an ermine cloak? And if she did, would she be likely to have brought it up from Suffolk at this time of the year? The curious smile slid down his cheek and vanished. He turned to Mr. Narkom, who had been watching him anxiously all the time.

"Well, my friend, let us poke about a bit more till your assistants get back from the shelter on the Common," he said and dropped down on his knees, examining every inch of the flooring with the aid of a pocket torch and a magnifying glass. For some moments nothing came of this, but of a sudden Narkom saw him come to an abrupt halt.

Twitching back his head, he sniffed at the air, two or three times, after the manner of a hound catching up a lost scent; then he bent over, brought his nose close to the level of the bare and dirty boards, sniffed again, blew aside the dust, and exposed to view a tiny grease spot not bigger than a child's thumbnail.

"*Huile Violette!*" he said, with a sound as of satisfied laughter in his voice. "No wonder the scent of violets lingered. Look! here is another spot—and here another," he added, blowing the dust away and creeping on all fours in the direction the perfumed trail led. "Oh, I know this stuff well, my friend," he

went on. "For many, many years its manufacture was a secret known only to the Spanish monks who carried it with them to South America and subsequently established in that part of the country now known as Argentina a monastery celebrated all over the world as the only source from which this essential oil could be procured."

"Argentina?" repeated Narkom agitatedly. "My dear chap, have you forgotten that it was in Argentina Lord St. Ulmer spent those many years of his self-imposed exile? If then, the stuff is only to be procured there——"

"Gently, gently—you rush at top speed, Mr. Narkom. I said '*was*,' recollect. It is still the chief point of its manufacture, but since those days when the Spanish monks carried it there others have learned the secret of it, notably the Turks who now manufacture an attar of violets just as they have for years manufactured an attar of roses. It is enormously expensive; for the veriest drop of it is sufficient, with the necessary addition of alcohol, to manufacture half a pint of the perfume known to commerce as 'Extract of Violet.' At one time it was a favourite trick of very great ladies to wear on a bracelet a tiny golden capsule containing two or three drops of it and supplied with a minute jewelled stopper attached to a slender golden chain, which stopper they occasionally removed for a moment or two that the aroma of the contents might diffuse itself about them. I knew one woman—and one only

—who possessed such a bracelet. You, too, have heard of her. Whatever her real name may be, she is simply known to those with whom she associates as 'Margot.'"

"Scotland! The queen of the Apaches?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"I ought to be. I, myself, stole the bracelet from the collection of the Comte de Champdoce and presented it to her. I remember that the stopper to the capsule was carved from a single emerald that, owing to its age—it was said to have belonged in its day to Catherine de Médicis—had worn loose, and could only be prevented from dropping out and allowing the contents to drip away by wedging it into the orifice in the capsule by winding the stopper with silk."

Narkom's face positively glowed.

"My dear Cleek, you give me the brightest kind of hope," he said enthusiastically, as he stooped and investigated the tiny, perfumed grease spots on the floor, so clearly made by the dropping of some oily substance that there could be no question regarding their origin. "Then, there can be no possibility of connecting young Geoff Clavering or the girl he loves with this ghastly business if that Margot woman has been here, and it was from her bracelet that these stains were dropped? Besides, after what you said about that fellow of her crew who was spiked to the wall as this poor wretch here is——"

"A moment, my friend—you are on the rush

again," interjected Cleek. "All that we actually *know*, at present, Mr. Narkom, is that some one, and very likely a woman, has been here and—unconsciously, of course—has spilled some drops of a very valuable and highly concentrated perfume. This naturally points to a defective stopper to the article containing that perfume, but whether or not that defective stopper was one carved from a single emerald and wound with silk——"

He stopped and let the rest of the sentence go by default. All the while he had been speaking he had been following, after the manner of a hound on the scent, the trail of that perfume's lead; now it had brought him to a litter of rat-gnawed paper and a parcel containing a peach and the remnants of a roasted fowl. As if the scent seemed stronger here than elsewhere—so strong, in fact, that it was suggestive of a goal—he began tossing the scraps about, till at last he gave a sort of cry and pounced upon something in a distant corner.

"Cleek!" rapped out Narkom in an excited but guarded tone, as he noted this, "Cleek, you have found something? Something that decides?"

"Yes," the detective made answer. "Something which proves that, whoever the woman who dropped the scent may be, Mr. Narkom, she was *not* Margot!"

He unclosed his hand and stretched it out toward the superintendent, and Narkom saw lying on his palm a crushed and gleaming thing which looked like a child's gold thimble that had been trodden upon.

The snapped fragment of a hairlike gold chain still clung to it, and at the end of this dangled a liliputian stopper, a wee mite of a thing that was little more than a short, thick pin of plain, unjewelled, unornamented gold.

"One of the 'capsules' of which I spoke, you see," said Cleek, "and bearing not the slightest resemblance to the one belonging to Margot. The thing has snapped from its fastening and been trodden upon—trodden under a very heavy foot, I should say, from the condition of it. There is something engraved upon it, something that won't tend to ease your mind, Mr. Narkom. Take my glass and look at it."

Narkom did so. Engraved on the crushed and fragrant-smelling bit of gold he saw a coat-of-arms—arms which he, at least, knew to be those of the house of St. Ulmer—and under this the name "Katharine."

"Good Lord!" he said, and let the crushed bauble fall back upon the palm from which he had lifted it. "That child—that dear girl who is as much as life itself to young Geoff Clavering? But how could she—a slip of a girl like that——"

He turned and looked over at the dead figure spiked to the cottage wall.

Cleek made no reply—at least for the moment. He had gone back to the "hound's trick" of sniffing the trail and was creeping on again—*past* the litter of papers this time—and crawling on all fours toward the very doorway by which the police had first gained access to the room.

"Wait! Cross no bridges until you come to them," he said at last in an excited whisper. "Some one who trod upon that thing passed out this way. I *knew* I smelt the oil the very instant I crossed the threshold; now I can understand why. The assassin left by the very door you entered, but whether man or woman——"

By now the trail had led him to the very threshold of the room. Beyond lay the dark hall by which Narkom and his men had entered the house, and the light of his upraised electric torch shining out into that black passage showed him something that made his pulses leap. It was simply a fragment of some soft pinkish material, caught and torn off from a woman's skirt by a nail head that protruded above the level of the boarded floor. He rose and ran out to it; he caught it up and examined it; then, with a laugh, shut his hand over it and went hurriedly back to the superintendent's side.

"Mr. Narkom," he said, "tell me something! We have, presumably, found a perfume receptacle belonging to the Lady Katharine Fordham; but did you notice—can you remember what manner of frock her ladyship wore at Clavering Close to-night?"

"I remember it very well indeed. It was a simple white satin frock, very plain and very girlish, and she wore a bunch of purple pansies with it."

"Ah-h-h!" Cleek's voice was full of relief, his eyes full of sparkle and life. "Then she did *not* wear a gown of some soft, gauzy pink material, eh? An

airy sort of gown trimmed at the hem with scalloped embroidery of rose-coloured silk. Good! Can you remember any lady to-night that did?"

"Yes," said Narkom promptly. "Miss Ailsa Lorne did. She wore some soft, gauzy pink stuff—chiffon, I think I've heard the wife call it—with a lot of rose-coloured silk stitchery on the edges of the flounces, and she had a band of pink ribbon in her hair."

Cleek made no comment, nor did his countenance betray even the slightest trace of emotion. He simply put the shut hand that held that gauzy pink fragment into his pocket and shoved it far down out of sight.

A while ago he could have sworn that Ailsa Lorne's foot had never crossed the threshold of this house of crime; now he knew that it had, and if the evidence of this scrap of chiffon stood for anything, crossed it *after* she had left Clavering Close—after she had heard that threat against the Count de Louvisan's life.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

BEFORE Mr. Narkom could ask any questions, the sound of excited voices and hasty footsteps coming up the drive and making toward the lonely house drove all other thoughts from his head.

"Come along," he whispered to Cleek. "It's Hammond and Petrie returning from the keeper's shelter on the Common. I know their voices. And they have unearthed something startling or they wouldn't be talking so excitedly."

They had, indeed, as he learned when he hurried out and intercepted them at the cottage steps; for between them they were supporting a man stripped of coat, waistcoat, and hat, and wearing bound round his head a bloodstained handkerchief. His bearded face was bruised and battered, his shirt and trousers were covered with mud, and he was so weak from loss of blood that it was next to impossible for him to stand alone.

"Sir," broke out Hammond, as they came up with Mr. Narkom and paused with this unexpected newcomer beforehim, "I don't know whether that French mounseer is a wizard or not, but he copped the lay

at the first guess, Mr. Narkom, and foreigner or not I take off my blessed hat to him. Here's what we found when we got to the shelter, sir—this here party, knocked senseless, tied up like a trussed fowl, and tucked out of sight under the gorse bushes nigh the shelter. Coat, cap, badge, and truncheon all gone, sir—nicked by that dare-devil who took us in so nicely down there at the old railway arch. The murderer himself he were, I'll lay my life; for look here, sir, here's what he most brained this poor chap with—a hammer, sir—look! And a hammer was used, wasn't it, to spike that dead man to the wall? Had him, Mr. Narkom, had the rascal in our very hands, that's what we did, sir, and then like a parcel of chuckle-heads we went and let him go."

"It is a trick that has succeeded with others besides yourselves," said Cleek, who had been bending over the injured man. He looked up at Narkom significantly. "Monsieur, I expect my assistant here any minute now. Would it not be as well to report this shocking affair to the local authorities?"

"Certainly, monsieur!" agreed Narkom, who had forgotten that Dollops might arrive now at any moment.

"What about this poor chap here, sir?" interposed Petrie. "He's in a desperately bad way. Oughtn't we to take him with us, and turn him over to the hospital folk?"

"Non—that is, not yet, my friend," softly interposed Cleek. "Your good superintendent and I will

look after him for a little time. There is a question or two to ask. He will bear the strain of talking now better than he might be able to do later. Notify the hospital officials as you pass through the town proper, and have an ambulance sent out. That's all. You may go."

"Well, so help me," began the indignant Petrie, then discreetly shut up and went. A moment later the limousine had whizzed away into the mist and darkness with the three men, and Cleek and Narkom were alone with the injured keeper.

"I expect that is Dollops in his taxi," whispered Cleek. "I thought I heard the sound of a motor. That will obliterate every track if you don't stop him. Head him off if you can, dear chap, and set him to work directly you have dismissed the taxi. Tell Dollops to measure and make a drawing of every footmark in and about the place. Quickly, please, before it is too late."

Mr. Narkom hurried off and vanished in the mist, leaving his ally alone with the dying man, for that he was dying there could be no question.

A bullet had gone through his body; a hammer had battered in the back of his head; he was but partly conscious—with frequent lapses into complete insensibility—and the marvel was not that he occasionally uttered some wandering, half-coherent sentences, but that he was able to speak at all.

"My poor chap," Cleek said feelingly, as he administered a stimulant by which the keeper's flagging

energies were whipped up. "Try to speak—try to answer a question or two—try—for a woman's sake."

"A woman's?" he mumbled feebly. "Aye, my poor wife—Gawd 'elp her—her and the kiddies! And me a-goin' 'ome, sir—me a-gettin' of my death like this for jist a-doin' of my duty—doin' of it honest and true, sir, for king and country!"

"And both letting you face the nightly peril of it unarmed!" said Cleek bitterly; then, passionately: "Will you wake up, England? Will you wake up and do justice by these men who give their lives that you may sleep in peace, and who, with a badge and a truncheon and two willing hands, must fight your criminal classes and keep law and order for you?"

"Aye—some day, may like—some day, sir," mumbled the dwindling voice; then it trailed off and sank sobbingly away, and Cleek had to administer more brandy to bolster up his fading strength.

"A word," he said eagerly, the hammering of his heart getting into his voice and making it unsteady. "Just one word, but much depends upon it. Tell me—now—before anybody comes: Who did it? Man or woman?"

"I dunno, sir—I didn't see. The mist was thick. Whoever it was, come at me from behind. But there was two—there must have been two—one as I heard a-runnin' toward me when I challenged, sir, and—and got shot down like a dog; and 'tother as come at me in the back when I sang out 'Murder' and blew my whistle for help. But men or women,

whichever it may a-been, I never see, sir, never. But one woman *was* on the Common to-night. A lady, sir —oh, yes, a lady indeed."

"A lady? Speak to me—quickly—my friend is returning. What did that lady wear? Was it a pink dress? Or couldn't you see?"

"Oh, yes, I could see—she came near me—she spoke in passing. She gave me a bit of money, sir, and asked me not to mention about her bein' out there to-night and me havin' met her. But it wasn't a pink dress, sir; it was green—all shiny pale green satin with sparklin' things on the bosom and smellin' like a field o' voylits on a mornin' in May!"

The sense of unspeakable thankfulness that Cleek experienced upon hearing that the dress of this unknown "lady" was not pink, was lost in a twinkling in one of utter and overwhelming surprise at learning that it was *green!* Pink, white, and green, here were three evening dresses called into the snare of this night's mystery; and yet a *third* woman now involved. White satin, that had been Lady Katharine Fordham's gown to-night; pink chiffon, that had been Ailsa Lorne's. Who then was the wearer of the pale green satin gown? Here was the riddle of the night taking yet another perplexing turn.

A clatter of hasty footsteps came along the drive and up the steps to the veranda, and Narkom, in a state of violent excitement, stood beside him.

"All right," he said, answering Cleek's inquiring glance. "I headed the taxi off and set Dollops to

work as you suggested—and a blessed good thing I did, too, otherwise we might have lost valuable clues."

"There *were* footsteps then?"

"Footsteps? Great Scott, yes, heaps of them: the absolute continuation of those which led me and my men to this house. But the madness of the thing, the puzzle of the thing! No man on earth can run away in two directions, yet there the blessed things are, going down the road at full tilt and coming back up it again still on a dead run. Two lines of them, old chap, one going and the other returning and both passing by the gate of this house. By it, do you hear?—*by* it, and never once turning in; yet in the garden we have found marks that correspond with them to the fraction of a hair, and we know positively that the fellow *did* come in here. It licks me, Cleek—it positively licks me. It's beyond all reason."

"Yes," admitted Cleek, thinking of the green satin dress. "It is, Mr. Narkom, it certainly is."

"Dollops will bring the drawings he's making to you as soon as he has covered all the ground," resumed the superintendent almost immediately. "Clever young dog that and no mistake. But to return to our muttons, old chap. Did you get anything out of this poor fellow? Any clue to the party who assaulted him?"

"None. He doesn't know. For one thing, the mist prevented him seeing his assailant, and for another, he was first shot down by some one who was

running toward him and answered his challenge with a bullet, and then pounced upon by somebody else who was behind him and floored him with the hammer. I take it that the person who was running and who fired the shot was advancing toward him from this direction—was, in fact, the actual assassin—and that having discharged the pistol and caused this poor fellow to whistle a call for assistance to the constable in Mulberry Lane, he was put to it to get out of the box in which he found himself by those two things. To escape across the Common meant to be pursued by the constable and driven across the track of one of the other keepers; so he took the bold hazard of putting on this poor chap's coat, cap, and badge and playing at joining in the hue and cry in the manner he did. Is that"—turning to the dying man—"the truth of it?"

The keeper could only nod—he was now too far gone to make any verbal response, and even the administering of another dose of brandy failed to whip up his expiring strength.

"I'm afraid we shall never get any more out of him, poor fellow," said Cleek feelingly. "He is lapsing into unconsciousness, you see. Raise him a bit, make him a little more comfortable if pos—— Quick! Catch his head, Mr. Narkom! Don't let it strike the boards. Gone!—a good true servant of the public gone! And the blackguard that killed him still at large!"

Then he gently folded the useless hands and closed

down the sightless eyes, and shaking out the coat which Petrie had bundled into a pillow, spread it over the dead man and was very, very still for a little time.

"There's a widow—and some little nippers, Mr. Narkom," he said when he at length rose to his feet. "Find them out for me, will you? And if you can see your way to offer a good substantial reward for the clearing up of this case and the capture of the criminal, I'll pull it off and you may pay that reward to the mother of this man's children."

"Cleek, my dear fellow! How ridiculously quixotic. What on earth can you be thinking about?"

"A woman, Mr. Narkom—just a woman—and a few little nippers . . . who might take the wrong road as—well, as somebody I know of took it once—if there wasn't a hand to help them or a friend to guide. That's all, dear friend, that's all!"

Lifting his hat to that silent, covered figure, he turned and walked away. But at the foot of the steps leading down to the mist and darkness of the drive he came to a halt; and there Narkom, following almost instantly, joined him again.

"My dear fellow, of all the impulsive, of all the amazing men," he began; but got no further, for Cleek's upthrown hand checked him.

"We won't go into that, Mr. Narkom," he said. "We'll stick to the case, please. I've got something to tell you that you haven't heard as yet. Something that that poor dead chap did manage to tell me. A

woman—a lady—was out there on the Common to-night and paid him not to disclose the fact."

"Great Scott! My dear fellow, you don't surely mean to hint that by any possibility that poor child, Lady Katharine Fordham——"

"No, I do not. The lady in question was neither Lady Katharine Fordham, who, you tell me, wore a white satin dress to-night, nor yet Miss Ailsa Lorne, whose frock you say was of gauzy pink. The lady in question wore, I understand, a gown of very pale green satin with what I take to have been several diamond ornaments upon the corsage; furthermore, a delicate but very distinct odour of violets clung about her."

"Good Lord!"

"No wonder you are surprised, Mr. Narkom. Ladies dressed in that fashion are not, as a general thing, given to wandering about Wimbledon Common either by night or by day, and the presence of this particular one is curious, to say the least of it. I am of the opinion, however, that she was no stranger to the Common keeper, otherwise he would have hurried her into the shelter the instant she offered to bribe him, whistled up the constable in Mulberry Lane, and given her in charge as a suspicious character. Then there is another side to the affair which we must not overlook. An entertainment was in progress at Clavering Close to-night, and there must have been quite a number of ladies present dressed in gala attire. But if your exclamation means that you

have no recollection of seeing one who wore a gown of pale green satin——"

"It doesn't!" rapped in Narkom excitedly. "It was the absurdity, the madness, the—the utter impossibility of the thing. That she—she of all women——! What rot!"

"Oho!" said Cleek, with a strong, rising inflection. "Then there *was* such a gown in the rooms at Clavering Close to-night, eh? And you do remember the lady that wore it?"

"Remember her? There's nobody I should be likely to remember better. It was Lady Clavering herself!"

"Whew-w! The hostess?"

"Yes. Sir Philip's wife—young Geoff's stepmother; one of the sweetest, gentlest, most womanly women that ever lived. And to suggest that she . . . either the fellow must have deliberately lied or his statement was the delusion of a dying man. It couldn't have happened—it simply couldn't, Cleek. Why, man, her ladyship was there—at the Close—when I left. It was she who put that jewel into my hand and asked me to leave it at Wuthering Grange when——"

He stopped, biting his words off short and laying a nervous grip on Cleek's arm; and Cleek, facing about abruptly, leaned forward into the mist and darkness, listening.

For of a sudden, a babble of angry voices, mingled with the sounds of a scuffle, had risen from the road

beyond the gates, and hard on the heels of it there now rang forth sharply the shrill tones of Dollops crying out at the top of his voice:

"None o' yer larks, now! Got yer! Gov'ner! Mr. Narkom! This way! Come quick, will yer? I've copped the bounder. Out here in the bushes under this blessed wall!"

CHAPTER SIX

A LITTLE DISCREPANCY

THE distance between the gates of Gleer Cottage and the porch wherein lay the body of the dead keeper was by no means a short one, but at the first sound of Dollops's voice the two men sped down the centre of the dark, mist-wrapped drive and out into the lane, their electric pocket torches sending two brilliant streams of light in front of them. The sounds of scuffling feet and of wrangling voices guided them along the broken, irregular line of the crumbling brick wall which encircled the grounds of the cottage, and following the lead of them, they came presently upon an amazing picture.

Close to that identical spot where, earlier in the night, Hammond had found the gap in the wall, two figures struggled together: the one, in a vain endeavour to free himself from the clutches of his captor; the other intent on bringing him to the ground, on which lay scattered all the drawings and paraphernalia with which Dollops had evidently been carrying out his master's instructions. The light of the torches revealed his prisoner to be a sturdy, fair-haired young man, and a first glance showed Cleek that he was arrayed in a fashionable light-weight

overcoat which, torn open in the struggle, showed him also to be in immaculate evening dress. It hardly needed Mr. Narkom's startled exclamation, "Geoff!" to tell the detective that this was indeed the son and heir of Sir Philip Clavering, the young man whose bitter threats against the dead man in the cottage had been so swiftly carried out.

But the exclamation had a far-reaching effect upon Dollops's prisoner, for he ceased struggling at once and faced round upon the superintendent so that the full glare of the torches could fall upon his features and leave not a shadow of doubt regarding his identity.

"Hullo! Mr. Narkom!" he exclaimed. "This *is* a stroke of good luck and no mistake! Who and what is this enterprising individual upon my back? I can't see his interesting face, for he pounced upon me in the dark; but if I had known that his yells and cries were likely to bring *you* upon the scene, I certainly shouldn't have gone to the length of struggling and getting my clothes in this awful mess."

Cleek made a mental tally of that remark, and set alongside of it the circumstance that Dollops, when he first called out, had most distinctly mentioned Mr. Narkom by name. He said nothing, however; merely removed the pressure of his thumb from the controlling button of his torch, slipped that useful article into his pocket, and busied himself with picking up Dollops's effects from the ground.

"Here you, whoever you are! You keep your

blessed thievin' irons off them things!" snapped Dollops, with a wink at the superintendent. "I say, Mr. Narkom, sir, don't let that josser go carryin' off my drorin's—them's for my gov'ner, *you* know that. And, sir," he went on earnestly, "don't you be took in by none of the gammon of this 'ere person. Actin' suspicious and creepin' along in the dark he was when I 'opped up and copped him, sir, and no matter if he *is* a party as you're acquainted with, sir——"

"He is," interrupted the superintendent curtly, not, however, without some slight show of agitation at finding this particular young man in the neighbourhood at this particular time. "The gentleman is Mr. Geoffrey Clavering, my friend Sir Philip Clavering's son and heir."

"Well, sir, I can't 'elp that," began Dollops, but his words were interrupted by the captive himself.

"I shouldn't have blamed you if you had failed to recognize me from the state I'm in through the mistaken ardour of this enterprising youth, Mr. Narkom," he said. "He appears not to have left one inch of my person unmarked with his hands; and if you would oblige me by requesting him to detach himself from me as expeditiously as possible, I shall be unspeakably obliged."

"Certainly, Geoff. Dollops, let the gentleman go."

"But, sir—Mr. Narkom——"

"Stand back, I tell you!"

"But upon my sacred word of honour, sir——"

"You have heard what I said, haven't you? That's enough," interrupted Narkom, sharply.

Dollops gave a swift glance at Monsieur Georges de Lesparre's face, then sullenly relinquished his hold on his prisoner, and with a knowing wink over his shoulder, busied himself with picking up his scattered and muddied papers.

"A jolly cheeky young beggar that, Mr. Narkom; I wonder you take his impertinences so lightly," said young Clavering, who seemed, somehow, to have lost a little of his self-possession now that it became evident the matter of his presence must inevitably be the topic of conversation. "I say, send him away, won't you? And if you would—er—send your friend away, too, I'd be obliged. I'd like to have a little conversation with you in private, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, Geoff. Dollops, take yourself off—hot shot!"

"Me, sir? My hat! Where'll I go? Wot'll I do, sir?"

"Go and continue what you were told to do in the first place. Gather up your traps, and be off about it."

"Oh, yuss—of course—nuthink easier than *that* after the way as the gent 'ere has went gallopin' all over 'em with his muddy boots!" said Dollops with apparent disgust. "Look at that for a sample of drorin', will yer?"

He slyly twitched the corner of his eye round in Cleek's direction, turned the mud-stained paper so

that he should see the footprint, and mumbling and muttering shambled away in the direction of the cottage and disappeared in the mist and darkness.

"I'm afraid, Geoff," went on Narkom as soon as Dollops had gone, "that I can't humour you to the extent of requesting this gentleman, too, to leave us; but let me have the pleasure of introducing him—Monsieur Georges de Lesparre, the famous French criminologist. We are engaged together upon a very serious matter to-night. In short, an exceptionally ghastly murder has been committed since I left Clavering Close, Geoff, and you will be horrified to hear——"

"Gently, gently, monsieur," softly interposed Cleek, who, while appearing to be absorbed in acknowledging the introduction, had been quietly taking in every detail relative to the young man's appearance and had decided offhand that he liked him; that he was simply a handsome, straight-looking, frank-faced, clear-eyed young fellow who, in the general order of things, ought not to have one evil impulse in him. "Shall one go into details that may, possibly, be unnecessary?" he went on. "Perhaps Mr. Clavering has already heard of the crime, and it is that which is accountable for his presence in this neighbourhood."

In his heart he knew that there was no such possibility, that there was not even the ghost of a chance that news of the murder could so soon have gotten abroad when even the local police had not yet learned

of it, and he threw out this "feeler" hoping that young Clavering would rid himself of any shadow of complicity by at once rejecting it. To his disappointment, however, Geoff rose to it as a trout to a fly; and his face, which had betrayed a strong effort to repress an overwhelming agitation from the instant Narkom made mention of the crime, now lit with something like relief and thankfulness.

"Yes, that's the case. You have guessed it, monsieur," he said gratefully, a sound that seemed a curious blend of a sigh and a sob getting into his voice despite an effort to keep it level and emotionless. "I had gone to bed—that is, I mean to say I was getting ready to go to bed—but I knew I shouldn't be able to sleep, so I came down into the grounds for a walk and a smoke. The open air always does me good. All at once a motor came along with Mellish, the police constable, in it. I stopped him, and he told me of this awful thing. I nearly went mad. To think what it means to my dear girl! She hasn't heard yet, of course——"

"No," said Mr. Narkom. "She will have to be told in the morning. Poor girl, it will be a shock to her, but it means a great obstacle removed from your path."

"Yes," agreed the young man uneasily. "That's what made me so anxious to come here and find out for myself if the murderer had been traced. You see I lost my head a bit to-night,"he added half apologetically, "and you never know what people will say, so

I was just coming cautiously along when that cheeky young chap threw himself on me, mistaking me, I suppose, for the assassin."

He made an attempt to laugh, but even to Mr. Narkom it was palpable that the young fellow was making a desperate effort to cover up his agitation.

"You can't, in the circumstances, blame him for that, Geoff," replied Narkom. "Besides, it was a most indiscreet thing for you—you of all men—to come here to-night, especially after what happened at the Close."

"You mean about my threatening De Louvisan?"

"Yes. At least twenty or thirty persons heard that; and although after you were calmer and the Austrian had left the house, you excused yourself to your guests and were said to have gone to your room for the night——"

"I did go to it!" rapped in Geoff excitedly. "Purviss, my valet, will prove that if there's any question regarding it. Simply because I didn't have the heart to indulge in any more dancing or tomfoolery of that sort when my dear girl had been dragged away from me as though I were a leper. Good God, Mr. Narkom! *you* don't believe I had anything to do with this awful thing, do you?"

Cleek took the reins before Narkom could utter so much as a single word.

"Of a certainty he does not, monsieur. Who could on so slight a thing as the mere hot-headed outburst of an excited young man?" he said suavely,

making, as was his way, a cunning hazard that should at once prove or disprove a suspicion that lay at the back of his head. "And to base it upon no stronger circumstance than that you afterward left the drawing-room and did not return! Ridiculous! One might as well suspect Lady Clavering herself when she, too, was obliged to retire and leave her guests for the time, if merely absenting one's self is to be regarded as suspicious. It is what you Anglais shall call 'tommyrot,' that, eh?"

"Of course it is, monsieur—er—what's-your-name—of course!" assented Geoff gratefully, rather liking this suave and gentle Frenchman who seemed bent upon coming to his rescue and showing him the way out whenever matters took an awkward turn. "You're a jolly, sharp-sighted chap, you are, and you spot the weak points in these affairs like a shot. My stepmother doesn't often suffer from headaches, but just as it happens, she was so queer that she had to lie down for about an hour; but her maid can prove that she stopped in her room, just as Purviss can vouch for it that I remained in mine."

The curious one-sided smile moved up Cleek's left cheek, then vanished again.

"Quite so, quite so," he said blandly. "Besides, it is not with Lady Clavering that we are concerned, but with the owner of a jewel that we found on the spot—a little gold scent bangle that smelt of violets——"

"My God! Kathie's! She said she lost it!" cried

Geoffrey through his clenched teeth; then realizing what his words meant, he turned on the two men fiercely.

"What do you mean? What are you trying to infer? That she—my dear girl—— Good heavens! but if you dare to bring her name into this horrible business, I'll throttle the pair of you! You shan't connect her with the abominable affair! By God, you shan't!"

"M'sieur is too quick with his threats," put in Cleek suavely. "Would it not be as well to wait? Unfortunately, we have only too much proof that a woman was concerned in the murder, and——"

"But it was not Lady Katharine. That I swear!" The young man's voice shook with emotion, and his strained eyes gazed from one face to the other in heartbreaking intensity.

"You are absolutely sure that you have no suspicion of the murderer's identity?" Cleek asked with a sharpness unusual to him. "No reason to doubt any living soul?"

For just the merest fraction of a second young Clavering appeared to hesitate.

"No," he said curtly. "No, I have not. I know no more about it than a child. Mellish told me about the murder, and it was only natural that I should come up here to make inquiries."

"But, yes, monsieur, of course," agreed Cleek softly. "There is, then, no more to be said save good-bye. I fear me I shall not have the pleasure of

meeting you again, as I return to Paris to-morrow. The case is one of the most mysterious, and I leave it to your English detective, Mr. George Headland. So it is adieu, monsieur, and not au revoir."

He held out his hand to the young man, who grasped it in his own trembling one, and then, with a sharp "good-night," Geoff Clavering turned and strode back in the direction whence he had come.

"Hum-m-m!" said Cleek, taking his chin between his thumb and forefinger and rubbing it up and down. "A total denial! And with enough decency to blush! Quite so! Quite so!"

Mr. Narkom, knowing the signs and being torn with eagerness for the father of that rash boy, moved forward and laid a shaking hand upon his sleeve.

"Cleek," he said in a whisper full of anxiety and excitement, "don't keep it back, dear chap. You've come to some conclusion. Speak up, do, and tell me what you make of it?"

"Make of it, Mr. Narkom? Well, for one thing, I make of it that that young man lied like a pick-pocket and deliberately attempted to throw dust in our eyes. He not only *does* suspect some one—and with good grounds, too—but he has been here before and in that house to-night. In other words, his was the foot that crushed that golden capsule. The scent of the *Huile Violette* was upon the drawing paper, the measure, the muffler, the cap—every blessed thing he trod on in his scuffle with Dollops!"

"Good God! Oh, his poor father! Surely, surely, Cleek, you do not believe——"

"My dear Mr. Narkom, I never suffer myself to 'believe' anything until I have absolute proof of it. What I may *think* is a different matter."

"And you think of that boy—what?"

"That he is either a hot-headed, quixotic, loyal, lovable young ass, Mr. Narkom, or he's a remarkably dangerous and crafty criminal! I'm put to it for the moment to decide which. One thing is pretty certain, and that is that young Geoffrey Clavering knows more of this crime than he will admit, and that the woman he is shielding is Lady Katharine Fordham, who was not only on the Common but in Gleer Cottage itself with Master Geoffrey."

"Good heavens! Cleek, how do you know that?" cried Mr. Narkom, his voice hoarse and shaken.

"Firstly, because his clothes are all scented with that peculiar scent of violets, and although I know from the dead keeper that another woman, probably Lady Clavering, was on the Common, he is certainly not shielding her; otherwise he would not have admitted that she had absented herself from her guests. No, I think you will find that both the young people were out here to-night. Let's hear now what Dollops has to say."

A minute later there sounded the familiar cry of a night owl, which brought the boy himself running up at full speed.

"Lor' lumme, sir!" he cried disgustedly, as a quick

glance revealed the absence of his former prisoner. "You never went and let 'im go after me a-showin' of you the footprint wot he'd left on my drorin' paper! It's just the same as one of 'em in the lane wot you told me to measure, sir; measure 'em off yourself and see. And him a-playin' off innercent and actin' like he was a respectable gent as was comin' here unsuspectin' and got copped by mistake! He wasn't, the bounder! He was tryin' to sneak away, that's wot *he* was a-doin' of—trying to do a bunk before anybody dropped to where he was a-hidin'."

"What's that? Hiding? Did you say hiding?"

"Yes, I did, Mr. Narkom, and I'd a-told you of it at the time, only you wouldn't let me open me blessed mouth, but jist shuts me up and orders me off prompt. Hidin' in that blessed 'oller tree there—look!" He flashed the light of his torch upon a tree which stood about three or four yards distant. "In that he was," he went on, "and jist as soon as the motor had went and the way was clear, I sees him sneak out and make toward the Common; so I ups and does a tiptoe run along this strip o' grass, sir, so's me feet wouldn't make no noise, and jist as he starts to do a bunk I does a spring, and comes down on his blessed back like a 'awk on a guinea 'en."

Narkom twitched up his chin and looked at Cleek; and for a moment there was silence, a deep significant silence, then Cleek spoke.

"How shall we sum him up by the measure of these things, Mr. Narkom, as a hero or as a scoundrel?" he

said. "If he is innocent, why was he hiding? And if not for a criminal purpose, why did he come to this place at all?"

"Heavens above, man, don't ask *me!*" returned Narkom irritably. "It's the most infernal riddle I ever encountered. My head's in a positive whirl. But look here, old chap. Supposing he did have a hand in the murder, how on earth could he have coaxed De Louvisan to this house—a man who had cause to dread him, a man whose life he had threatened?"

"Perhaps he didn't, Mr. Narkom; perhaps somebody did the coaxing for him. A woman is a clever lure, my friend, and we know that one or two, perhaps three—— Oh, well, let it go at that."

A faint sound of an automobile horn sounded its blare through the distance and darkness.

"Lennard is coming back with the local authorities. I'd know the hooting of that horn among a thousand, Mr. Narkom. And with their coming, 'Monsieur de Lesparre' returns to his native kit bag. This way, Dollops—look sharp! Pick us up at the old railway arch as soon as you can, Mr. Narkom. We'll be on the lookout for you. Now then, Dollops, my lad, step lively!"

"Right you are, gov'ner. So long, Mr. Narkom. We're off—as the eggs said to the cook when she got a whiff of 'em."

"Good-bye for a little time," said Cleek, reaching out and gripping the superintendent's hand. "At

the arch, remember. It has been child's play up to this, Mr. Narkom. Now the real work begins. And unless all signs fail, it promises to be the case of my career."

And so, like this, he stepped off into the mist and darkness, and went his way—to the beginning of the chase; to the reading of the riddle; to those things of Love and Mystery, of Faith and Unfaith, of Sorrow and of Joy, whose trail lay under the roof of Wuthering Grange and which walked as shadows with Lady Katharine Fordham and Ailsa Lorne.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE"

ONCE the affair had been reported to the local police, news of the tragedy spread over the neighbourhood with amazing velocity, and by nine o'clock next morning there wasn't a soul within a radius of five miles who had not heard of it; by ten the Common and the immediate vicinity of Gleer Cottage were literally black with morbid-minded sightseers and reporters.

As yet, however, none but the police and the representatives of the press had been permitted to cross the threshold of the house or to obtain even the merest glimpse of the murdered man. For all that, certain facts relative to the position in which the body had been found, together with the mysterious marks upon his shirt bosom, had leaked out, and as Scotland Yard, as represented by Cleek and Superintendent Narkom, had chosen to remain silent for the present relative to such clues as had been discovered, this gave room for some fine flights of fancy on the part of the representatives of the press.

The special correspondent of the *Evening Planet* "discovered" that the Count was "a well-known Austrian nobleman" who had offended the famous

Ravaschol group, and was the author of the equally famous "Ninth Clause" which had acted so disastrously against it—a circumstance which, the *Planet* claimed, left no shadow of a doubt regarding "the true meaning of the mysterious markings upon the shirt bosom of the unfortunate gentleman." Whereupon the representative of its bitterest rival, the *Morning Star*, as promptly discovered that he was nothing of the sort; that he had been "positively identified" as the former keeper of a sort of club in Soho much frequented by Russian, German, French, and Italian anarchists; and that, on its being discovered by those gentry that he had sold to the police of their several countries secrets thus learned, he had been obliged to disappear from his regular haunts in order to save his skin. And, furthermore, as the address of the house in which that club had been maintained, and from which he had carried on his system of betrayal, was 63 Essex Row, the explanation of the markings was quite clear—to wit: "Four and two make six; one and two make three; furthermore, the peculiar formation of the repeated figure 2 is, of course, a rude attempt to make it serve for the letter S. as well; which, taken in conjunction with the three X's, leaves no room for doubt that these markings stand for Number Sixty-three Essex Row and for nothing else."

Now as it happened that 63 Essex Row had, at one time in its career, been the seat of just such a club and just such a proceeding as the *Morning Star* stated,

nothing was left the *Evening Planet* but sneeringly to point out that "the imaginative genius of our esteemed contemporary should not let it fail to remember that the man Lovetski—to whom it doubtless refers, and whose mysterious vanishment some years ago has never been cleared up—had his supporters as well as his accusers. It was clearly shown at the time that although he dwelt in the house where the 'club' in question held forth, there never was any absolute proof that he was himself in any way actually connected with it, his vocation being that of a maker of dressing for boots, shoes, ladies' bags, and leather goods generally, which dressing he manufactured upon the premises."

This statement, being correct, gave the *Morning Star* a chance to clinch its argument yet more forcibly and to prove itself better informed than its rival by coming out in its next issue with the declaration that "there can no longer be any question relative to the identity of the murdered man. That he is, or rather was, the long-vanished Ferdinand Lovetski who was formerly identified with the club *and* the boot-dressing industry carried on at 63 Essex Row, is established beyond all cavil, since the marks smeared upon his shirt bosom are now known to have been made with shoe-blacking of that variety which is applied and polished with a cloth, and which has of recent years almost entirely superseded the brush-applied variety of our fathers' and grandfathers' days!"

Narkom, much impressed thereby, showed these two articles from the *Morning Star* to Cleek.

"An ingenious young man that reporter, Mr. Narkom, and his deductions regarding those marks reflect great credit upon him," said the latter. "For it is positively certain that whoever he may or may not have been, the man certainly was *not* the Count de Louvisan, for the simple reason that there is *no* 'Count de Louvisan' in the Austrian nobility, the title having lapsed some years ago. The theory that the dead man is that Ferdinand Lovetski who formerly lived at 63 Essex Row, however, will bear looking into. It is well thought out. I should, perhaps, be more impressed with the genius of the chap who worked out so likely a solution to those mysterious figures if he hadn't made me lose faith in his powers of observation by the 'shoe blacking' statement. It is not a bad *guess*, in the circumstances—for each would leave marks very similar, if one trusted to the eye alone—but I happen to *know* that the figures were *not* smeared on with shoe-blacking, but with a stick of that greasy, highly scented black cosmetic which some actresses use for their eyelashes and some men employ to disguise the gray hairs in the moustache. You know the kind of stuff I mean. It is always wrapped in a brilliant, ruby-coloured tin foil; is to be found in most barbers' and hairdressers' establishments, and is very heavily and peculiarly perfumed. You will remember that, when I wanted to ascertain if the odour of the *Huile Violette* emanated

from the body of the dead man or not, I told you he *was* scented, but *not* with violets? Very well, the scent which was upon him was the peculiar spicy fragrance of that particular kind of cosmetic; and I had only to get one whiff of his shirt bosom to understand what had been used to make those marks upon it."

"My dear Cleek, could you be sure of that?" ventured Narkom. "I know the kind of stuff you mean. But few Englishmen use it these days, though I remember it was once very popular. It comes in light brown shades for fair people, as well as in black for dark ones; and the Count was extremely fair, almost flaxen. Could you be positive then that what you smelt was not on his hair or moustache? If he had used the light sort it would not show, remember."

"My dear Mr. Narkom, have you so poor an opinion of my methods that you fancy I would be likely to be slipshod in my examination, and to pass over so important a possibility as that? The man had brilliantine on his hair and moustache, and the latter had been dressed with curling irons! Believe me, when we find who put those marks upon him, we shall find some one who is addicted to the use of black cosmetic of the kind which I have mentioned."

And afterward, when the rush of events had crowded yet more important ones from his mind, Mr. Maverick Narkom remembered those words and set that statement down in his diary as another proof of the amazing thoroughness and the shrewd far-sightedness of this remarkable man.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AILSA LORNE

MRS. RAYNOR positively jumped as the premonitory knock trembled on the door before Johnston the butler opened it and entered. Ordinarily she was but little given to "nerves" and was by no means easily startled, but this morning was a decided exception to the rule. And why not? You don't get called up out of your bed every morning to learn that a gentleman who had been walking about your tulip beds yesterday afternoon had been barbarously murdered during the night in a house but a few yards away. Nor is it pleasant to face the likelihood of getting your name and your residence mentioned in the daily papers in connection with a police affair, and to know that before nightfall every groom, washerwoman, and chambermaid within a fifty-mile radius will have read exactly what the interior of your home is like, exactly what you wore when "our representative" called, and will know a good deal more about you than you ever knew about yourself.

"Begging pardon, madam, but a gentleman——" began Johnston, but was suffered to get no further.

"If it is a reporter I will not see him," interrupted

his mistress with a decisive wave of the hand. "You know very well that your master and Mr. Harry have gone over to the scene of the abominable affair to ascertain if there is or is not any likelihood of its being a case of mistaken identity; and you ought to know better, Johnston, than to admit strangers of any sort during their absence."

"Your pardon, madam, but nobody has called—at least at the door," replied Johnston with grave politeness. "The gentleman in question is asking over the telephone to speak with Miss Lorne."

"With me?" exclaimed Ailsa, turning around in the recess of the big bay window of the morning room where she had been standing with her arm about Lady Katharine Fordham and looking anxiously down the drive which led to the Grange gates. "Did you say that somebody was asking over the telephone for *me*, Johnston? Thank you! I will answer the call directly."

"My dear, do you think that wise? Do you think it discreet?" said Mrs. Raynor rather anxiously. "Consider what risks you run. It may be a reporter —I am told that they are up to all sorts of tricks—and to be trapped into giving an interview in spite of one's self—— Dearest, you must not let yourself be dragged into this abominable affair."

"I think it will be a clever man who can do that against my will—and over the telephone," replied Ailsa gayly. "I shan't be gone more than a minute or two, Kathie dear; and while I'm away, you might

get your hat and be ready for a stroll in the grounds when I come back. And you, too, Mrs. Raynor, if you will. The weather is glorious, and one might as well spend the time waiting for the General's and Mr. Harry's return in the open air as cooped up here at half-past nine o'clock on a brilliant April morning."

"My dear, you are wonderful, positively wonderful," said Mrs. Raynor admiringly. "How *do* you maintain your composure under such trying circumstances? Look at Katharine and me—both of us shaking like the proverbial aspen leaf and looking as washed out as though neither of us had slept a wink all night; and you as fresh and serene as the morning itself. No, I don't think I will go out, thank you. There may be people with cameras you know; and to be snapshotted for the edification of the readers of some abominable halfpenny paper——"

Ailsa did not wait to hear the conclusion of the remark, but slipped out, went hastily to the library and the telephone, and lost not a moment in making her presence known to the caller at the other end of the line. She had barely spoken three words into the receiver, however, when she gave a little start, eyes and lips were involved in a radiant smile, and her face became all red and warm with sudden blushes.

"Yes, yes, of course I recognize your voice!" she said in answer to a query unheard by any ears but hers. "How wonderful you are! You find out everything. I had meant to write and tell you, but we came up so unexpectedly and—— What!

Yes, I can hear you very distinctly. Pardon? Yes. I am listening." Then letting her voice drop off into silence she stood very, very still, with ever-widening eyes, lips parted, and a look of great seriousness steadily settling down over her paling countenance.

She had said that she would be absent for but a minute or two; it was five or six, however, before she came back, to find Lady Katharine and Mrs. Raynor just as she had left them.

"No, it wasn't a reporter," she said gayly in response to Mrs. Raynor's inquiring look. "It was a dear old friend"—blushing rosily—"a Mr. Philip Barch, whom I first met through my uncle, Sir Horace Wyvern, in the days before his second marriage. Mr. Barch has asked if he may be permitted to call this morning, and I have taken the liberty of saying that he may."

"Take a further one, dear, and ask him to stop to luncheon when he comes," said Mrs. Raynor. "When a girl blushes like that over the mere mentioning of a man's name—— Oh, well, I wasn't always fifty-two, my dear, and I flatter myself that I know the duties of a hostess."

Miss Lorne's only response was another and a yet more radiant blush and an immediate return to the side of the slim, dark girl standing in the recess of the window.

"Kathie, you are positively lazy," she said. "You haven't budged an inch since I left, and I distinctly asked you to get your hat."

"I know it," admitted Lady Katharine. "But, Ailsa, dear, I simply couldn't. I am afraid Uncle John and Harry may return, and you know how anxious I am."

"Still, Kathie, staying in will make no difference," said Ailsa gently, "and you will soon know when they arrive."

Reluctantly Lady Katharine let herself be piloted through the open French windows and out into the grounds, ablaze with flowers.

"I should think Geoffrey would be here, too," said Ailsa, with a swift glance at her companion's pale face. "He must have heard the news by this time, but something has evidently delayed him."

A wave of scarlet surged into Lady Katharine's face.

"Oh, if only he would!" she muttered. "I am so tired——"

"I daresay, dear," said Ailsa sympathetically. "You did not sleep well, darling, did you?"

"Yes, but I did—that's just the strange thing," said Lady Katharine quickly. "What made you think not, Ailsa?"

"Well, for one thing, I thought I heard your door open and shut in the night. I came within an ace of getting up to see whether you were ill, but fell asleep again myself."

Her companion looked puzzled. "It must have been a mistake on your part, Ailsa. I fell asleep almost directly my head touched the pillow, and

slept like a log until morning. But don't let's talk about last night." She turned impulsively to Ailsa, her voice thrilling with emotion. "It's no use," she said. "I simply can't feel sorry over it. I know I ought. Death is always horrible, and such a death!" She shuddered involuntarily. "But you don't know what a release it is to me. If this had not happened, I think I should have died——"

Ailsa pressed her arm in silent sympathy, but before she could speak Mrs. Raynor appeared on the scene. She had guarded herself against attacks of possible snapshotters by carrying an open parasol, and Ailsa was glad to change the topic of conversation.

It was some twenty minutes later, when they were still strolling in the gardens, that a taxicab halted at the lodge gates, and they saw a tall, slim figure arrayed in an exceedingly well-cut morning suit, with a rose in his buttonhole and shiny top hat on his closely cropped fair head, advancing up the drive toward them with that easy grace and perfect poise which mutely stands sponsor for the thing called breeding.

"My dears!" began Mrs. Raynor admiringly, "what a distinguished looking man!" She had time to say no more, for Ailsa, with a face like a rose, had gone to meet the newcomer—who quickened his steps at sight of her and was now well within earshot—and was greeting him as a woman greets but one man ever.

"My dear," said Mrs. Raynor to Lady Katharine, in a carefully lowered tone, "if I know anything, you

will be parting with that dear girl's companionship for good and all before the summer is over. Look at the man's eyes: they are positively devouring her. Of course we shall have to remain to welcome him, but I think we shall earn their gratitude if we leave them to themselves as soon as we decently can."

A few minutes later the opportunity to do this was offered her; and having lingered just long enough to be introduced to "Mr. Philip Barch" and to become even more impressed with him at close quarters as not only a man good to look at, but as an apt and easy conversationalist, she suddenly remembered that she and Lady Katharine had promised to gather some hyacinths for the lunch table, and forthwith spirited her away.

Cleek followed her with his eyes as long as she remained in sight, then he turned to Ailsa. "A very tender and sensitive girl I should say, Miss Lorne, although she bears herself so well under the cross of last night's tragedy. I see by your manner of looking at her that you are attached to her in many ways."

"Not in many, but in all, Mr. Cleek. She is the dearest girl in the world."

"We won't go into that, otherwise we should disagree for the first time in the whole course of our acquaintance. Let me thank you for adhering so closely to all that I asked over the telephone. I didn't mean to, at first. My original idea was to come here unknown to all, even to you; but when I came to think over it, it seemed so disloyal, so under-

handed, as if I didn't trust you in all things, *always*—that I simply couldn't bring myself to do it."

She looked up at him with grave sweet eyes—the eyes that had lit him back from the path to destruction, that would light him up to the gates of heaven evermore—and smiled on him, bewildered.

"I am afraid I do not follow you," she said. "I don't quite grasp what you mean. Oh!" with sudden fear, "if you thought from my cry of surprise when I recognized your voice over the telephone, that I was not glad—— Why, I was going to write to you this morning. But I expected it to be Geoffrey Clavering asking for Kathie, you know——"

The name brought a ridge between Cleek's brows as of a sudden disconcerting thought.

"Geoffrey Clavering? But he has been over here, this morning, has he not?" he asked anxiously.

"No, he has not, and that is what seems so strange," said Ailsa.

"Did he write no note to Lady Katharine then—send her no message, Miss Lorne?"

"No. I see that surprises you, Mr. Cleek, as, to be perfectly frank with you, it surprises me. I can't make it out. I know that his whole life is bound up in Kathie, as hers is bound up in him. I know that it nearly drove him frantic when he was told their engagement would have to come to an end; so one would naturally think that when there is a rumour that the man who came between them is dead—— And he *must* have heard by this time."

"Miss Lorne, let me tell you something," said Cleek gravely. "Geoffrey Clavering does know of the murder. He has known of it since twelve o'clock last night, to my certain knowledge."

"Mr. Cleek! And yet he has made no move to communicate with Lady Katharine! But"—with sudden hopefulness—"perhaps he wishes to make absolutely sure; perhaps the identity of the murdered man is not yet wholly established! Perhaps it is not really the Count de Louvisan after all."

"It *is* the Count de Louvisan, Miss Lorne! That was settled beyond all question last night."

"And Geoffrey Clavering knew it then?"

"And Geoffrey Clavering knew it then—yes! The man slain is, or rather was, the one known as the Count de Louvisan; on his dead body numbers whose total make up the sum of nine were marked; and—I fancy you remember what Geoffrey Clavering threatened when the fellow went to Clavering Close last night."

Ailsa looked at him, her eyes dilating, the colour draining slowly out of her cheeks and lips. It was impossible not to grasp the significance of these two circumstances, one of which—the mysterious markings on the dead man's body—she now heard of for the first time.

"Oh, Mr. Cleek, oh!" she said faintly. "You surely can't think—— A dear lovable boy like that! You can't believe that Geoffrey Clavering had anything to do with it?"

"I hope not, for, frankly, I like the boy. But one thing is certain: if *he* didn't kill the man, he knows who did; knows, too, that there is a woman implicated in the crime."

"A woman! Oh, Mr. Cleek, a—a woman?"

"Yes—perhaps two women!"

"Women and—and a deed of violence, a deed of horror, like that? No! Women couldn't. They would be fiends, not women. I hold too high an estimate of my sex to let you call them that! And for him, for Geoffrey Clavering, there is but one woman in all the world! Even you shan't hint it of *her!* No, not even you."

"Hush! I am hinting nothing. Now that I have seen Lady Katharine I would almost as soon think evil of you as of her."

There was a little summerhouse close at hand. He saw that she was faint, shocked, overcome, and gently led her to it, loathing himself that even for one moment he had brought pain within touch of her.

"Who knows better than I how false appearances may be?" he said. "Who should be less likely to take suspicious circumstances for proof?"

"Oh, but to suspect, even to *suspect*, Kathie—the dearest and the sweetest girl on earth."

"Again I dispute that!" he threw back with repressed vehemence. "And again I declare that I am not swayed by facts, black as they may be, black as they undoubtedly are. If I believed, should I come here and openly tell you of these things? My

duty is to the law. Should I not carry proofs there if I believed that they were proofs? But my faith is as a rock. Shall I prove it to you? Then look! I know that you will tell me the truth; and it is because of that, because in my heart I know it is a truth which you can and will face openly and with no cause for fear, that I have declined to hold this thing of sufficient importance to be called a clue, and as such to be handed over to the police. Miss Lorne—Ailsa—tell me, will you—have you ever seen this thing before?"

While he was speaking his hand had gone to his pocket and come forth tightly shut. Now he opened his closed fingers and let her see that there was a scrap of pink chiffon edged with rose coloured stitchery lying on his open palm. Her eyes, fixed earnestly upon his face heretofore, dropped to the gauzy fragment held out to her, and a ridge dug itself between her level brows.

CHAPTER NINE

BLIND GROPING

AILSA LORNE gave a little start as she examined the fragment.

"I thought at first that it was torn from my own dress," she said frankly, looking up at him, "for, as it happens, I was wearing a pink dress, but not quite of this shade. I will show it to you if you like."

"There is no need, Miss Lorne," said Cleek, his eyes shining. "If you tell me that you were not at Gleer Cottage last night, then there is no more to be said," and with a little laugh of sheer happiness he carefully replaced the bit of chiffon in his pocketbook. "Just one more question, please, Miss Lorne. Tell me: has Lady Katharine a certain kind of bracelet to which there is attached a small capsule by a link of gold, and which smells adorably of violets?"

"Yes. Anybody that knows her could tell you that. Her father, Lord St. Ulmer, brought it to her from South America. He had her name and the St. Ulmer arms engraved upon it. At least, upon what you have called the 'capsule,' which contains some highly concentrated perfume that makes the whole room fragrant whenever she removes a tiny gold stopper from the delightful thing."

"Thank you! I supposed as much. Now will you tell me, Miss Lorne, how long it is since Lady Katharine lost that little golden capsule from her bracelet? Was it, as I am hoping, on the day when you visited Gleer Cottage in company with her, or since?"

"What a strange question. She hasn't lost it at all. At least, she has made no mention of having done so, as I am sure she would if it *had* been lost. Always, of course, providing it wasn't lost without her knowledge. At any rate, she wore it last night when we went to Clavering Close. I know that, because I remarked at the time that she had better let a jeweller look at it, as the ring of the scent globe was very nearly worn through."

"Was that before you left the Grange or after?"

"After—a long while after—at Clavering Close; in fact, while we were taking off our wraps preparatory to going down to the drawing-room."

"Hum-m-m!" said Cleek, puckering up his lips and looking grave. "You are establishing a very unpleasant fact by that statement. It proves that, in spite of your belief to the contrary, Lady Katharine revisited Gleer Cottage last night, and that, too, *after* the affair at Clavering Close."

"How perfectly absurd! Why, she wasn't out of my sight for a single instant."

"Nevertheless, she certainly visited Gleer Cottage last night," repeated Cleek with calm persistence. "I know that beyond all possible doubt, Miss Lorne; for I myself found the capsule of that bracelet there,

crushed and broken, but still showing that the St. Ulmer arms and the name 'Katharine' had been engraved upon it. Don't look at me like that, please, or you will make me hate myself for having to tell you this."

"But I tell you it is impossible," she still protested. "I tell you she was never out of my sight for one instant from the time we left this house to the time we returned. No, not for one, Mr. Cleek, up to the very moment she left me to go to bed."

"Just so. But after that?"

"After that? After——" she began; and then stopped, and grew very pale and very, very still, for there had come to her a recollection of that moment when, as she had said, she fancied she heard Lady Katharine's door open and shut in the night when all the house was still.

"And after that?" repeated Cleek, driving the question home.

"How should I know?" she gave back, in something akin to panic. "How could I? We do not sleep together. But"—with sudden brightening—"this I do know, however: the bracelet was still on her wrist and the scent globe still attached to it, even then. I saw it with my own eyes."

"A clear proof that, as the capsule was dropped after that time, she left the house last night without your knowledge, Miss Lorne."

"I can't believe it; I will not believe it!" protested Ailsa loyally. "I know that she did not! I *know!*"

"How?"

"It is likely that you have not heard it, but Katharine is an accomplished violoncellist, Mr. Cleek. She loves her instrument, and in times of sorrow or distress she flies to it for comfort, and plays and plays until her nerves are soothed. Last night, after she left me, I heard her playing in her room."

"For long?"

"No. Of a sudden something went snap and the music ceased. She opened her door and called across the passage to me: 'Ailsa, pray for me. I am so wretched, so abandoned by fortune, that even the solace of my 'cello is denied me. I have broken the A-string and have not another in the house. Goodnight, dear. I wish I could break the String of Life as easily!' After that she closed and locked the door, and I heard her go to bed."

The A-string!

Cleek turned away his head and took his chin between his thumb and forefinger. *The A-string!* And it was with a noose of catgut that the Count de Louvisan had been strangled!

"I'll not believe that she left the house," went on Miss Lorne. "She is the soul of honour, the very embodiment of truth, and she told me herself that she 'slept like a log until morning.' If she had gone out after I left her, after I fell asleep——"

"It could be proved and proved easily," interposed Cleek. "The night was moist and foggy, the roads were wet and muddy. Her clothes, the hem of her skirt, the state of her shoes—— But I will not

ask you to play the spy upon your friend, Miss Lorne."

"Nor would I do it!" she flashed back spiritedly; then stopped and gave a little excited exclamation and laid a shaking hand upon Cleek's sleeve. An automobile had swung suddenly into view in the drive leading up from the gates to the house, and in it were two men: one white of hair and snowy of beard but as erect as a statue; the other slim and young and fashionably dressed, and so clearly of the order "Johnnie" that he who ran might read. The General and his son had returned from their visit to Gleer Cottage.

Miss Lorne made that fact clear to Cleek in a few words.

"Now we shall have the full account of everything in Harry Raynor's original and detestable style," she whispered. "You are so shrewd in guessing riddles, Mr. Cleek, tell me, if you can, why it is that lions so often breed asses, and that heroes so often father clowns? If you were to search the world you could find no truer gentleman, in speech, in manner, in instincts, in everything, than dear old General Raynor; and yet, if you were to search it thrice over, you could find no greater cad than his son."

"From what I can see at this distance he certainly does look like a fine example of the genus bounder, I must confess," said Cleek. "You do not appear to have much of an opinion of the young man, Miss Lorne."

"I have not. I detest him! I never did care for 'scented' men; and when they come down to the 'curling iron' and the 'dye stick' they are simply abominable!"

"The 'dye stick'?"

"Yes. You mustn't be deceived by that waxed and delicately darkened moustache of Mr. Harry Raynor's, Mr. Cleek. It would be as sandy as his hair if the wretched little dandy didn't darken it with black cosmetic because he is ashamed of the cow colour which nature so appropriately bestowed upon it."

Cleek screwed round on his heel and looked at Mr. Harry Raynor with renewed interest.

"I suppose I ought not to have said that," she continued, "but I do detest him so. I think I had better run and tell Kathie that they have come back, but I will not keep you waiting many minutes." She smiled brightly at Cleek, and with a little nod ran lightly off, leaving him to await her return.

But, despite his interest in Mr. Harry Raynor, Cleek dropped discreetly out of sight and into one of the many winding paths with which the grounds abounded. A few minutes' gentle stroll along this particular one brought him to the rear of the house, and before he quite realized it he found himself within the precincts of the stable. The yard itself was deserted save for a single groom who was evidently hard at work polishing a boot, and which, judging from the muddy appearance of its companion, must have proved no easy task.

Cleek gave one look at the expensively cut article of footgear, then he lounged across the yard.

"That's a pretty tough job, isn't it?" said he offhandedly. The groom looked up, but meeting the visitor's disarming smile, only gave vent to a grunt.

"Should think it is a tough job," he muttered. "They're his lordship's boots, an' 'ow 'e comes to make 'em in such a state beats me to fits. Fair caked with mud, and 'im in bed with a sprained ankle. It's that valet of 'is, I s'pose——" He broke off, then looked questioningly at Cleek.

"I've lost my way," he said, plunging his hand into his pocket. "I strolled down a path from the lawns in front of the house. Which one will take me back?"

"First path to the right, sir, and thank you," said the gratified groom, and a minute later found Cleek back at the spot where Ailsa had left him.

He certainly had to admit that the whole affair was most perplexing, and he was still pondering over the various points of the case when Ailsa Lorne returned, and for a few moments they paced the lawn in silence; then Cleek turned with a little smile.

"I suppose we shall have to go and meet the General," said he serenely. "Shall we meet Lady Katharine's father as well?"

"Oh, dear, no! The man's in bed with a sprained ankle. Can't put his foot to the ground."

"Oh! Indeed? Then that explains it, of course. I wondered."

"Explains it? Explains what?"

"Why, his not being about at such a time—not appearing to take any interest in his daughter's affairs, especially her deliverance from a loveless marriage. It struck me as curious when I saw her. But I set it down to the possibility of there being bad blood between them. Is there?"

"No, there is not," said Ailsa, falling unconsciously into the trap. "Kathie is not the kind of girl to hold a grudge against any one, Mr. Cleek. She is intensely emotional, but she is also intensely loyal. The very last person in the world she would be likely to treat spitefully would be her father."

"I see. She is fond of him, then? Probably I have heard the wrong version of the story. Have I? I was told that it was he who compelled her, very much against her will, to accept the attentions of the —er—Count de Louvisan and to become engaged to him. That she begged her father to save her from marrying the man, but he would not—or could not—consent."

"That is quite true. You have not been misinformed. She did just what you have been told. Indeed, I happen to know that she even went so far as to get down on her knees to Lord St. Ulmer and implore him to kill her rather than to compel her to give up Geoff—and especially for a man she loathed as she did the Count de Louvisan. It was useless, however. That same night Lord St. Ulmer asked her to come to him alone in the library at Ulmer

Court. They were together for two hours. The next day she accepted the Count de Louvisan."

"I see!" said Cleek. "Of course, his lordship told her something which influenced her beyond her own will and desires. Do you happen to know what that something was?"

"No. She has never told me one word beyond that she went into that library with a breaking heart, and came out of it with a broken one."

"And in spite of all that, she still loves this father who compelled her to give up all that life held, eh?"

"I didn't say that. I said that she was loyal to him, not that she loved him. How could she love a father whom she had not seen since she was a baby—whom she did not even know when he came back to claim her? Why, she hadn't even a picture to tell her what he looked like, and in all the years he was away he never wrote her so much as one line. A girl couldn't love a father like that. She might like him, she might be grateful to him, as Katharine is, for loading her with all the things that money can buy; but to love him—— What is the matter, Mr. Cleek? What in the world made you say 'Phew' like that?"

"Nothing! Do you happen to know if the late Count de Louvisan was ever in Argentina, Miss Lorne?"

"No, I do not. Why?"

"Oh, mere idle curiosity, that's all. Turned up suddenly at Ulmer Court, didn't he? Any idea from where?"

"Not the slightest. He called quite unexpectedly one evening after we all—Kathie, his lordship, and I —had been over to the autumn races at Fourfields. That was an unfortunate day altogether. We did not see the conclusion of even the first race. Lord St. Ulmer was suddenly taken ill, although he had been quite well a moment before, and was so bad that we had to leave immediately. Nothing would do him but that we must drive home as quickly as possible, so that he could consult our local doctor."

Cleek glanced at her swiftly. "Hum-m-m! Bad as that, was he?" he asked. "What did the local doctor think caused the illness? Or did his lordship recover on the way home, and find it unnecessary to call him in at all? Ah, he did, eh? Queer things those sudden attacks; you never know when they will come on or when they will go off again. Possibly his present illness came just as suddenly. Did it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied Miss Lorne. "I wasn't there when it happened. Nobody was. Kathie and I had just gone into the refreshment room at the railway station for tea—Lord St. Ulmer said he didn't care for any, and would just step round to the news stall and get an afternoon paper—and when we came out there he was, poor man, sitting on a seat and groaning. He stepped on a banana peel, he said, and turned his ankle. A few minutes later Count de Louvisan put in an appearance. He had arranged to join us at Liverpool Street Station, and, no doubt, would have done so, but at the last

minute Lord St. Ulmer had made up his mind to journey up to town by an earlier train than originally arranged. Anyway, his lordship made him go and wire to General Raynor that he was afraid our visit would have to be postponed indefinitely, as he had met with an accident and was going direct to the Savoy Hotel. Of course the General came with his motor, and wouldn't listen to his stopping there; so we all came on, as agreed, to Wuthering Grange. That was the day before yesterday, and Lord St. Ulmer has been in bed ever since."

"Very neat, very neat indeed," commented Cleek. "Couldn't tell me, I suppose, where I might get a peep at—I—er—mean who is the doctor attending to him?"

"He hasn't a doctor. He wouldn't have one. He is a very obstinate man, Mr. Cleek, and simply would not allow General Raynor to call in the local practitioner. Claims that he brought some wonderful ointment with him from Argentina which, as he phrases it, 'beats all the doctors hollow in the matter of sprains and bruises'; and simply will not allow anybody to do anything for him."

Cleek puckered up his brows. Obviously it would be useless to represent himself as an assistant to the local doctor, or even to make himself up to pass muster for that doctor himself, for the purpose of examining a man who would not see any medical man upon any pretext whatsoever. And yet—— He gave a little toss of his shoulders, as if to throw away these

fresh ideas, and came back again to Lady Katharine. What other proof could he secure? Why had she played the 'cello at all at such a time? Was it to secure that very string? Was it but a cloak to hide her designs? A swift idea flashed across his mind, as he recalled Lennard's story of a lady in an ermine cloak. He turned suddenly to his companion.

"Miss Lorne," he asked, "did Lady Katharine bring her ermine cloak with her when she came up from Suffolk?"

"No," said Ailsa in reply. "And for the very best of reasons: she hasn't one."

"Oh, I see. Know anybody who has?"

"Yes, I have. Lady Chepstowe gave me hers when she went to India. Why?"

"Oh, just a fancy of mine, that's all," replied Cleek with apparent offhandedness. "I seem to fancy that I heard something about Lady Katharine having had her portrait painted wearing a very superb ermine cloak. But, of course, if she hasn't one—or —yes, she might have borrowed yours. You'd lend it to her, I know—lend it like a shot. Did you?"

"I certainly did not. For one thing, she never in her life asked me to; and for another, whoever told you that tale about her having her portrait painted wearing one must be blessed with a very remarkable imagination. She had no such portrait painted. And I never lent her the cloak for any purpose at any time."

"I see. Couldn't have left it lying about where anybody might pick it up, could you?"

"How like a man that is," she said gayly. "Fancy a girl, especially one in my position, being possessed of so valuable a thing as an ermine cloak, and then leaving it about like a fan or a garden hat! No, I did not leave it about. Indeed, I couldn't if I had wanted to."

"Why?"

"For the very good reason that I sent it to the furrier's to have it made into a muff and stole."

"May I ask when? Recently?"

"No; quite two months ago. They are storing it for me, and will make the alterations in time for next winter's wear. As a cloak, of course, it is quite useless to a girl in my position. But really, I must go now. Kathie will think it very heartless of us if we do not fly to hear the General's report. Wait for me here, please. I shall be back directly."

Then she hurried out of the summerhouse and taking a path which led round to the rear of the Grange, passed from sight and left Cleek to his own devices.

CHAPTER TEN

ANOTHER STRAND IN THE WEB

THE arrival of Mrs. Raynor and the General upon the scene, with Harry Raynor in their wake, gave a different atmosphere, so to speak, to Cleek's thoughts, and he threw himself, heart and soul, into getting into the good graces of the family. He did not much fancy Mr. Harry Raynor, who was too self-assertive to be pleasant company to a matured man of the world, and just at the age which may be best described in the quotation, "young enough to know everything."

Nevertheless, he had made up his mind to secure an invitation to stay overnight at Wuthering Grange, in order that he might have a peep at Lord St. Ulmer, and he knew that it was only by making himself a boon companion of the young man that he could hope to secure it. About three and twenty, the idol of an adoring mother, if not of his father, that gentleman was of the type that favour the ladies of the ballet with their attentions, and prefer chorus girls, stage doors, and late suppers to home amusements and the like; and it was not long before Cleek had him nicely "managed" and in the desired frame of mind.

A casual remark about a certain dashing musical-

comedy actress who had sprung into sudden prominence set the ball rolling; then Cleek expressed in confidence a burning desire to know the lady and deep disappointment over the fact that he knew no one who was in a position to introduce him; and in ten minutes' time he had his fish hooked.

"I say, you know, I'll give you an introduction to her like a shot, old chap, if you really do want to know her," young Raynor imparted to him in deep confidence as he led him outside and got him away from the ladies. "Know her like a book! Rippin' sort! Introduce you any time you like. My hat! yes!"

"Really?" said Cleek with every appearance of boundless delight. "You know her—you actually know her?"

"Yes, rather! Know the whole blessed shoot of 'em from Flossie Twinkletoes down. Get reams of letters from 'em and bushels of photos—all autographed. I say, come up to my den and have a peep. You never saw such a gallery!"

Cleek admitted to himself when he saw them that he never had, for the room was literally smothered under photographs of actresses, gymnasts, ladies of the music-hall persuasion, and public characters in general.

"Always sport my oak, you know," said the young man with a laugh and a wink, as he locked the door behind him. "Pater might see 'em, and then there would be a time of it. Awful old muff, the pater;

good sort, you know, but he'd have this lot in the fire in less than no time if he knew. Fearful old fossil. Flowers, fruits, rubber at whist, pipe, and an old army friend—that's his idea of life."

Cleek felt like taking him by the back of the neck and kicking him. He didn't, however. He had other fish to fry; and he succeeded so well that before he left that room he had an invitation to stop the night, and as he had brought no evening clothes with him, the offer of a suit to meet the emergency.

"Look here, I'll tell you what, Barch," said Raynor when this invitation and this offer were accepted, turning round as he spoke—he was at a window which overlooked the drive up from the gates of the Grange —"chaps like us don't want to sit in a drawing-room and waste time with a pair of prunes and prisms like Lady Katharine Fordham and that prig of a Lorne girl. If you're in for a lark, we'll slip out and I'll show you a bit of life on the sly. I like you—I'm blest if I don't; so if you're game for a kick up, I'll let you into a secret and give you the time of your life. Now, then, listen here, old chap."

He stopped abruptly as a sudden grating sound of wheels rose from the drive, and looking down, he saw that a vehicle had swung in through the gates and was advancing toward the house.

"Oh Lord! that settles it; now we're in for a visitation!" he said with an expression of deep disgust. "There's that prig of a chap, Geoff Clavering, driving in. Can't stick that fellow at any price!"

Geoff Clavering! Cleek rose as he heard the name, walked to the window, and looked out. So, then, he had not been so far out in his reckoning after all. Geoff Clavering had come at last to seek an interview with the girl of his heart.

Why the boy had delayed until now Cleek could not guess, unless it was because of a shrinking dread of going abroad anywhere at such a time; but that he had nerved himself to come at last for something more than a mere call was apparent at first glance; for his face was white and strained, and it was evident, even from this distance, that he was labouring under strong excitement.

Undoubtedly there would be, as he had surmised, a private interview arranged between those two people, and undoubtedly he must manage to overhear it. What a pity that this should have happened at this particular time, that young Clavering should have arrived while he was up here, out of the way of seeing what happened when Geoff and Lady Katharine first met!

A glance, a movement, a hundred different things, might tell him what he wanted to know if he were there at that moment of first meeting. But perhaps it was not yet too late. The carriage hadn't reached the entrance of the house as yet; perhaps, if he hurried, if he went at once——

"I say, let's go down, Raynor," he said desperately. "I don't know what's come over me, but my head's suddenly begun to swim, and I'm afraid I shall keel

over if I don't get out in the air. We can let the lark you were speaking of rest until afterward. Come on, will you? By Jove! you know, I'm in a fearful way."

And from the effort to carry out the impression of extreme giddiness a curious thing came:

Clapping his hand to his head, and wheeling staggeringly round to make his way to the door, he had the good or ill fortune to blunder against a little table, upon which stood what was undoubtedly an earthenware tobacco jar, and to send it crashing to the ground. Instantly and out of it there rolled, on top of the quantity of spilled tobacco which had originally been used to cover it, a little silver box, which flew open as it fell and disgorged a photograph, a couple of letters in a woman's hand, and a fragment of pink gauze.

Cleek had just stooped to pick these things up and to lay them back upon the table, when a yet more curious thing happened.

"I say! You let those things alone!" snapped young Raynor excitedly; and springing forward, whisked them out of his hand. But not before Cleek had made a rather startling discovery: the letters were written in a woman's hand—a hand he recognized the instant he saw it—and the picture which accompanied them was a photograph of Margot. He had no longer a desire to hurry downstairs.

The rudeness of his act and of his manner of speaking seemed to dawn upon young Raynor almost as

he snatched the photograph and letters, and he hastened to apologize.

"I say, don't think me stable-bred, Barch," he said, a flush of mortification reddening his face. "Didn't mean to rip out at you like that, b'gad! Fact is, I was a bit excited; forgot for a moment that you're a pal. So don't get your back up, please."

"I haven't the slightest intention of doing so, dear chap," replied Cleek, who, it must be confessed, was a little shaken by the discovery. "Every man has a right to cut up a bit rough when he thinks some other fellow is going to pry into his secrets. And I reckon this is one of your pet mashes—eh, what?"

"Yes, something like that. The latest—and a ripper. French, you know. That's what rattled me for the moment. The dad loathes French women. I'm extra careful to keep this one's picture out of sight. I say! Don't know what you'll think about my manners, but I forgot all about your asking to go down and get out into the air. Sorry, old chap! Come along! Take my arm, and I'll help you."

As the breaking of the tobacco jar had deprived Raynor of again making use of that as a means of hiding the little silver box and its contents, he had, while speaking, crammed the letters, the photograph, and the scrap of pink gauze into an inside pocket of his coat, and now came forward and took Cleek's arm with the amiable intention of leading him from the room.

There was, of course, in the circumstances nothing

for it but to go, much as Cleek would have preferred to stop and trace the connection between young Raynor and Margot; but he was far too careful in his methods to cast any doubt regarding the genuineness of that sudden attack of a moment before by pretending that it had begun to abate, and therefore yielded himself to the inevitable.

But he had this consolation in doing it: not only would he now be enabled to witness the meeting between Geoff Clavering and Lady Katharine Fordham after all, but as a man who is ill is always more or less an object of sympathy and attention upon the part of women, he foresaw that he might induce Lady Katharine to hover round him, and thus bring Geoff Clavering within close range for easy and careful studying. Nor did he fear that he had lost all opportunity for pursuing the subject of Harry Raynor's acquaintance with Margot. The mere fact that that young man had the contents of the little silver box upon his person might easily cause an apprehensive inquiry regarding the risk of carrying them about where they might be dropped, and so brought to his father's attention; and from that inquiry it would be simple work getting back to the subject itself without exciting any suspicion regarding his keen interest in it. He therefore allowed young Raynor to lead him from the room.

"Fearfully groggy, old chap, fearfully," he said in answer to young Raynor's inquiry regarding how he felt as they went down the dim passage toward the

staircase; "head going round like a teetotum; hope I don't keel over and spoil the evening's sport by having to be put to bed like a kid. Don't want two sick men on one floor, do you, eh? Or is it on this floor that Lord St. Ulmer's room is situated?"

"Yes, that one over there—second door from the wing staircase. Speak low, old chap, or you may disturb him. Sleeps like a cat, they say—one eye and both ears always open. Doesn't do anything but sleep, I imagine, day and night, from the way he keeps to his room. Hullo! I say! What's it? Aren't going to crumple up, Barch, are you?"

This, because Cleek had suddenly lurched against the bannister at the head of the stairs, and swung clean round until his back was resting against it.

"No—that is, I hope not; but I do feel rotten, old chap," replied he. "Just half a second, will you?"

He lolled back his head, gave a sort of groan, and rapidly and silently began to count the doors and to make sure of the location of Lord St. Ulmer's room. "All right; only a passing spasm, I reckon, old chap," he went on as soon as he had discovered that his lordship's door was the third from the end of the passage, and that his window would, therefore, be the second from the angle of the wing in the outer wall of the house. "Come on—let's go down." And leaning heavily upon young Raynor, he descended to the dining-room.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE CLOUDBURST

THE delay, trifling though it was, occasioned by the smashing of the tobacco jar and the discovery of the photograph, served to interfere with the smooth progress of events, as it fell out that Cleek did not, after all, rejoin the party below in time to witness the first meeting between Geoffrey Clavering and Lady Katharine Fordham, for the carriage had arrived at the entrance to the house before he put in an appearance, and the General and Mrs. Raynor, Ailsa and Lady Katharine, were out on the veranda talking excitedly with young Clavering when Harry and Cleek came upon the scene.

There is a subtle magic in love that dispels all other emotions, and despite the gravity of the situation, a look of happiness radiated from Lady Katharine's face, reflected, though in a far lesser degree, upon Geoffrey Clavering's; indeed it did not need an overkeen eye to detect that the young man was seriously ill at ease, and general conversation languished.

Cleek's entry, therefore, with young Raynor's announcement of his sudden attack of faintness, not only drew all attention, but, as he had foreseen, he

became an object of extreme solicitude upon the part of the ladies.

"Crocked up, poor beggar, and came within an ace of bowling over," explained young Raynor as he led him to a seat in a big wicker chair. "Sharp attack of indigestion, if I know the symptoms. Bet you a hat, mater, it was that beastly cheese soufflé we had for lunch. Enough to kill a dog, that stuff. But you will give that silly ass of a cook his head, and let him serve up anything he likes. How are you, Clavering? Things look like going all right for you after all—eh, what? 'Tisn't every man who can have his rival's wind shut off to order."

The remark could not be said to be a happy one, despite the fact that the maker of it laughed as though he had just perpetrated a witticism; for even his doting mother could not but deplore it.

"Harry, darling, how can you?" she said reproachfully, as young Clavering coloured and the two girls looked distressed and indignant. "Darling, you ought to think before you speak."

"Huh!" grunted the disgusted General. "If he did, he probably wouldn't speak at all. It seems to me, Harry, that you must lie awake at nights planning how you can arrange to say just the wrong thing upon all occasions—you do it so constantly."

"Oh, that's it—just lay everything on me!" responded his dutiful offspring sulkily. "I'm always doing the wrong thing—if you believe what other people say. Seems to me that the best thing I can do

is to take myself off, and then everybody will be happy. I say, Barch, when you feel like yourself again you'll find me either at the stables or in the pater's blessed ruin taking lessons in etiquette from the family ghost—if the pater has been able to rake up one and coax him to reside there."

And with this ill-natured dig at his father's pet weakness this engaging young gentleman lurched down the steps of the veranda and walked surlily away round the angle of the house.

The place which he had spoken of as "the pater's ruin" was a little fad of the General's, whose love of antiquities and the like had tempted him to transform a bare and unattractive part of the Grange grounds into something at least picturesque if not in the very highest good taste. Ancient ruins had always been a passion with him, but as you can't have ancient ruins in modern Wimbledon, the General had had a ruin built for himself, modelling it after the crumbling remains of an old Scottish castle which had appealed to his artistic eye, planting it with ferns and enwrapping ivy and vines of Virginia creeper, and even supplying it with owls and bats to keep up the illusion. It was his one harmless weakness, his one foible—that ruin; and nobody but his son ever mocked him for it, though many laughed in their sleeves and secretly made game of his foolish whim.

Cleek had heard of the "ruin" at Wuthering Grange before he had ever set foot inside the gates of the place; and hearing of it again—now, like this

—he felt that he would like to kick the young cub who could publicly mock his father's folly in this fashion. He saw the General's kindly old face flush with anger and mortification, and was not at all surprised when he presently made an excuse to get away and retired indoors.

Meantime, Cleek's plan of pretending illness had panned out precisely as he had imagined, and was productive of the results he desired. Essentially feminine and of a highly sympathetic nature, Lady Katharine hovered near him, doing all in her power to ease the sufferings of one whom she shrewdly suspected of being very near to the heart of her dearest friend, and this naturally brought Geoffrey to the little group surrounding him, and enabled him to study his attitude at close quarters.

The more he saw of Sir Philip Clavering's son and heir, the better he liked him; but although the young man occasionally turned an adoring look upon Lady Katharine, and appeared to be doing his best to share her evident high spirits, it was apparent to Cleek, after a moment's study, that his attitude was for the most part assumed. He made no attempt to get away from the others and have the lady of his heart all to himself, and whenever he and she were for a moment separated from Mrs. Raynor and Ailsa Lorne, he was nervous, distressed, and acted with an air of restraint that was as puzzling as it was pronounced.

A chance remark regarding the state of Lord St.

Ulmer's health brought from Lord St. Ulmer's daughter the happy, excited remark:

"Oh, Geoff, dear, he's improving every hour, and he has been so wonderfully kind and tender to me this afternoon that I could kiss him. Just think, he says that things can go on now just as they did before Count de Louvisan came; that there is nothing now to come between us, Geoff; nothing to keep us apart for another moment!"

"Really? That's ripping!" said young Clavering, and in his effort to appear delighted smiled the ghastliest parody of a smile possible to conceive. It was so pronounced that even Lady Katharine herself noticed it and looked puzzled and distressed.

"You don't seem very glad," she said, a note of pain in her voice, a look of pain in her reproachful eyes. "*Aren't* you glad, Geoff? And is that why you did not come over to see me before?"

"Don't be silly, Kathie. I couldn't come any earlier because—well, because I couldn't, that's all."

"A very lucid explanation, I must say. What is the matter with you, Geoff? You're not a bit like yourself to-day—is he, Ailsa?"

But Ailsa made no reply. There was none really needed. Geoffrey had taken hardly any notice, but as if struck with a sudden thought, whipped out a notebook and began shuffling the pages nervously through his fingers.

"I'd nearly forgotten, Kathie," he said apologetically; "my mother asked if you would lend her these

books." He handed her the torn leaf with something scribbled upon it. "Any time will do, but she said you would have them."

Lady Katharine looked down at the writing, and a wave of colour surged over her face.

"But——" she commenced.

"I don't want them now; in fact, I can't stop even now, only I just wanted to know that you were all right."

There was no mistaking the look of adoration on the young man's face, but she looked at him reproachfully.

"Going back again, so soon!" she said softly, averting her head, while her lips trembled and her hand clutched painfully on the leaf of the notebook.

"I'm afraid I must, dear," responded Geoff. Then he turned swiftly to Cleek, who had been watching the little scene, the peculiar one-sided smile looping up the corners of his mouth.

"Good-bye, Mr. Barch; pleased to have met you," he said without, however, coming forward and offering his hand.

"Thanks! same to you; good-bye," replied Cleek, and that same smile was still on his face when a minute or two later, young Clavering having taken his departure, Cleek was rejoined by Ailsa Lorne.

"What do you think about it?" she asked abruptly. "What is it that is wrong? Oh, Mr. Cleek, do you think——"

"I'll be beyond 'thinking' before the morning. I shall know," he interposed. "Now, show me the way to that ruin, please. I want a word or two with Mr. Harry Raynor if he is there. Down that path, is it? Thanks very much." And swinging down from the veranda, he moved away in the direction indicated.

A brisk two minutes' walk brought him to the picturesque ruin with its ivy-wrapped walls, its gaping Gothic windows, and its fern-bedded battlements, so artfully copied that the stones actually seemed to be crumbling and the plants to have been set there by Nature rather than by man. Even the appearance of a dried-up moat and a ruined drawbridge was not wanting to complete the picture and to give an air of genuine antiquity; and he had just stepped on the latter to make his way across to the wide arch of the entrance when he was hailed, not from within, but from behind.

He faced round suddenly to see young Raynor moving quickly toward him. He was walking rapidly, and appeared to be in a state of great excitement.

"I say, Barch, hold on a moment, will you?" he sang out. Cleek gave him time to get to the drawbridge and then the reason for his excitement became known. "Look here, old chap, I'm afraid we shall have to give up our little 'lark' for this evening, after all. Rotten bad luck, but I've just got a message that will call me to—well, somewhere else; and I've got to go at once. Don't expect I shall be able to get back this side of midnight; but if you

don't mind prolonging your stay and making it two nights instead of one——"

"Not in the least. Delighted, old chap."

"Oh, well, then, that's all right. Have our night out to-morrow instead—eh, what? Look here, Barch, blest if I don't like you immensely. Let you into the secret. It'll be with 'Pink Gauze.'"

"Pink Gauze? Don't mean the little Frenchy, do you—the little beauty of the photograph?"

"The very identical. Be a good boy, Barchie, and I'll take you to see her to-morrow night. What do you think—eh, what?"

Cleek didn't say what he thought; it would have surprised the young man if he had.

"Well, ta-ta until midnight or thereabouts, old chap. So long!" And with a wave of the hand he was gone.

Cleek stood and looked after him for a moment, a curl on his lip, an expression of utter contempt in his eyes; then he gave his head a jerk indicative of a disgust beyond words, and, facing about, walked on into the ruins.

The General had done the thing well, at all events. The atmosphere of antiquity was very cleverly reproduced: walls, roof, floor—all had the appearance of not having been disturbed by the hand of any one for ages. Half-defaced armorial bearings, iron-studded doors, winding staircases, even a donjon keep.

This he came to realize when the sight of a rusted

iron ring in the floor tempted him to pull up and lay back a slab of stone that appeared centuries old, and to expose in doing so a twisting flight of stone steps leading downward into the very depths of the earth.

Really, you know, the old chap had done it well. Cells down there, no doubt—cells and chains and all that sort of thing. Well, he had time to spare; he'd go down and have a look at those cells. And, leaving the stone trap-slab open, he went down the black stairway into the blacker depths below, flicking the light of his torch about and going from cell to cell. One might swear that the place was centuries old. Rusty old barred doors, rustier old chains hanging from rings in the walls. Nothing modern, nothing that looked as if it had known use or been disturbed for these hundreds of years; nothing that—— Hello! There was a break in the illusion, at all events: a garden spade, with fresh earth clinging to the blade of it, leaning against the wall. Fancy a man so careful of preserving an atmosphere of antiquity letting one of the gardeners leave—— No, b'gad! it hadn't been left merely by chance. It had been brought here for use, and was probably left for *further* use. There was a place over in that corner that most decidedly had been recently dug up.

He walked over to the place in question and directed the glow of the torch so that the circle of light fell full upon it. Somebody had been digging in the earthen floor of the cell, and had made an attempt to hide the fact by sprinkling bits of stone and plaster

scraped from the walls over it. In the ordinary course of things, and with a light less powerful than this of the electric torch, the thing would have passed muster very well, and would, in all probability, have escaped observation. Now, asked Cleek of himself, what the dickens should any one wish to dig in this place for? And, having dug, why try to disguise the fact? Hum-m-m!

He switched round suddenly, walked to the place where the spade stood, in the angle of the wall opposite, took it up, and, returning, began to dig where the digging had been done before.

This he had to do in the darkness, for the moment his thumb was removed from the button of the torch the light went out. But, having once located the place, this was not difficult, for the earth, having once before been disturbed, yielded easily to the spade.

For five—possibly six—minutes he worked on, shovelling out the loose earth and tossing it aside unseen; then, of a sudden, the spade encountered something which, though soft and yielding, would not allow the blade to penetrate it at all, press his foot down as hard as he might. If Cleek knew anything at all, he knew that that betokened a fabric of some sort, and knew, too, that he had got to the bottom of the original excavation.

He laid aside the spade, and the electric torch spat its light into the hole.

Clothing at the bottom of it—buried clothing!

He stooped and pulled it to the surface, letting the

articles thus unearthed drop one by one from his fingers. A cap, a pair of trousers, a coat with a badge on it, a stick with a loop of leather by which to carry it, a belt, and a number on that belt.

He looked at the number; it was a brass "4." He looked at the badge, and then rose upright, clamping his jaws hard and understanding.

What he had unearthed was the clothing of the Common keeper who had been done to death last night—the clothing which the assassin had stolen and worn.

And he had found that clothing here, hidden in the grounds of Wuthering Grange! Why, then, in that case, the murderer—— He stopped; and the thought went no farther—stopped, and releasing the button of the torch, let utter darkness swing in and surround him.

Some one had entered the ruin—some one was moving about overhead.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE THUNDERBOLT

IT WAS not a man's foot that made that soft noise; his trained ear recognized that fact at once. A woman, eh? What woman would be coming here at this time when all the ladies of the household would be in their rooms dressing for dinner?

He crept in the darkness out of the cell in which he had been digging, through the one next and through the next again, until he came to the passage leading to the staircase, and then, dropping on his hands and knees, went soundlessly up the stone steps.

Above him as he crept upward—as slow as any tortoise and with far less noise—sounded the woman's faint footfalls pacing the paved floor with that persistent restlessness which tells of extreme agitation. He had but just begun to ask himself what that agitation might portend, when something occurred which caused him to twitch up his head with a jerk and crouch there, a thing all eyes and ears.

The woman's footsteps had ceased abruptly, brought to a sudden halt by the ring of others—the nervous, heavy-heeled, fast-falling steps of an excited man coming across the drawbridge and into the ruin at a pace which was almost a run; and that man

had no more than come into range of the woman's vision when the thin, eager voice of Lady Katharine Fordham sounded and made the situation clear.

It was a tryst—the lovers' meeting upon which Cleek had built such high hopes and upon which he had blundered by the merest fluke.

"Geoff!" sounded that enlightening voice, with a nervous catch in it which told of a hard-hammering heart. "Thank heaven you have come. Ailsa thinks I am in my room dressing for dinner. Now tell me what it is all about, there's a dear, for my head has been in a whirl ever since I read what you wrote. Why did you want me to come here and meet you without anybody knowing? Whatever can it be that you 'have to say to me that no one on this earth must hear'? Do tell me. I'm frightened half to death!"

"Are you?" His footsteps clicked sharply as he moved rapidly across the floor toward her. "You have not gone so far as I, then, for I believe I have been frightened *past* death, and that after this nothing on earth or in heaven or hell can appall me! Come here, into my arms, and let me hold you while I speak. How I love you! My God, how I love you!"

"Geoff!"

"Put your arms round me. Kiss me! I want you to know that I love you so well I'll fight all the dogs of justice and all the devils of hell but what I'll stand by you and save you from them. They can't kill my

love for you. Nothing on God's earth can do that. I'll come between them and you no matter what happens, no matter what it costs me—life with all the rest. That's what I've come to tell you! But, oh, my God, Kathie, why didn't you let *me* kill him?"

"Kill him, Geoff? Good heavens, what are you talking about? Kill whom?"

"De Louvisan!"

"De Louvisan? Let you kill De Louvisan—I? Oh, my God! Geoff—you—think—*I*—killed—killed—him?"

Geoff groaned and buried his face in his hands. "There was no one in the house but you," he said hoarsely. "It was you who took me into the place; it was you who showed me his dead body spiked up there against the wall—you and you alone. My God! Kathie, what is the use of denying what we both know?"

Cleek sucked in his breath, drew every muscle of his body taut as wire, and then crouching back in the darkness listened intently.

Lady Katharine remained perfectly silent for a moment, as though she had been stricken dumb by the directness of the charge: as though the half-despairing, half-impatient protest of that final "What is the use of denying what we both know?" had impressed her with a realization of the utter futility of longer endeavouring to act a part.

It was either that that held her silent, Cleek told himself, or she was utterly amazed, utterly overcome

by an accusation which had no foundation in fact and had fallen upon her like a thunderbolt. If the latter should prove to be the case, why, then, Geoff Clavering would be lying, and she would be wholly and entirely innocent of the crime with which he had charged her.

Then she spoke suddenly:

"You mean this thing? You really and truly *mean* it?"

Geoff bowed his head in silent assent.

"That I—I—did this thing?"

Still he could not answer, could not put into brutal words the conviction that had been forced upon him.

"That I met you and took you into Gleer Cottage last night?" she went on. "Took you in there and showed you that man's—body? I?"

"Not exactly showed it to me—that, as we both know, is an exaggeration. You showed me into the room where it was hanging, however. Or, at least, you waved me to the door and told me to go in there and wait a minute or two and you'd rejoin me and show me something that would 'light the way back to the land of happiness!' But you never did rejoin me. I waited in that dark room for fully ten minutes but you never came back. Afterward, when I struck a match to light a cigarette and saw that dead man spiked to the wall—God! I think I went mad for the moment. I know I ran outof the house, although I do not know when nor how; for when I came to my senses I was racing up and down the right-of-way

across the fields; and if it had not been for you I should have run on until I dropped. But all of a sudden I remembered you, remembered that in rushing out of the house I had left you there; and you might come back to that room and find me gone, and think that I had deserted you. I ran back to the place as fast as I could. I remembered that when first you met me and took me into it you had led me in through the gates and up the drive to the door; but when I got back there a horror of the place seized me. I couldn't have gone in that way again had my life depended upon it. There was a break in the boundary wall. I got back into the grounds that way, cutting my wrist—look, see, here's the mark—on the fragments of broken glass which still adhered to the coping. I ran through the gardens and round to the back of the house. I burst open the rear door and raced along the passage to the room where De Louvisan's body hung. You were not there. I struck another match to see, noticing this time that there was the half of a candle standing upon the mantelpiece, where it had been secured in its own wax. I took that thing and lit it and ran through all the house, hunting for you. There was not a trace of you anywhere—and at last, in a panic, I rushed from the house and flew for my very life. But there was no getting away so easily as all that. Lights were shining, men were coming, the hue and cry had begun. I could not go forward; I dared not go back. I remembered the old hollow tree where we used to

play in our kiddy days, you and I. I ran to that and got inside of it—and I was there through all that followed. I was found in time, and it might have ended badly for me but for my father's friend, Mr. Narkom, and a French detective—a muff of a fellow named De Lesparre. It didn't, however. I got off scot free, thanking God that no suspicion pointed your way, and telling myself that you had not left so much as one hair from the ermine cloak you wore that might be caught up as a clue to bring the thing home to you!"

"The ermine cloak I wore! You say I wore an ermine cloak?"

"Yes. An ermine cloak and the same pretty white frock you had worn at the Close earlier in the evening. It was the white of the ermine that first attracted my attention in the darkness when I looked up and saw you near the gates of Gleer Cottage."

"That is not the truth!" she flung back, with a sudden awakening from the sort of stupor which, up till now, had mastered her. "I never wore an ermine cloak in my life! I never was nearer to Gleer Cottage last night than I am at this minute; and if you say that I met you, that I spoke to you, that I even saw you, or that you saw me after Ailsa Lorne led me out of the drawing-room at Clavering Close when you threatened the Count de Louvisan's life, you are saying what is absolutely untrue."

"Kathie!"

"I repeat it, utterly and absolutely untrue."

"Good God! Do you accuse me of lying?"

"There must be some horrible mistake. Some one impersonated me for some awful purpose. You never saw me again after I left your father's house last night, and you know it. But, in any case, since you confess that you were there, what took you to Gleer Cottage last night at all?"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A QUESTION OF VERACITY

GEOFFREY CLAVERING'S reply to Lady Katharine's staggering question was given so promptly that one might have been tempted to believe he had expected it and prepared himself for the question beforehand.

"I had no idea of going there at first," he said. "I couldn't remain among the guests after you had left the Close and Narkom's men had bundled that De Louvisan out of the house; my head seemed full of fire, and I simply couldn't. I got away as soon as I decently could, and went upstairs to my own room. I couldn't stop there, either; the stillness and the loneliness half maddened me and set me to thinking and thinking until I thought my head would burst. So, in sheer desperation, I caught up a cap, sneaked down the back stairs, and let myself out. Nobody saw me go, and, thank God, nobody saw me return, either. I walked about the Common for heaven knows how long before I turned round at the sound of some one coming toward me through the mist, and the next thing I knew I 'bumped' smack into that person, and found it to be my stepmother."

"Lady Clavering?" said the girl in a tone of the

utmost surprise—and Cleek could have blessed her for the words, since they voiced an inquiry upon a subject which he much desired to have explained. "You mean to say that Lady Clavering was out there on the Common, away from her guests? What could have impelled her to take such a step—and at such a time?"

"She had come in search of me, she said. She felt anxious, distressed, afraid, so she said, that I would do something desperate, and went to my room to talk with me. When she found it empty she jumped to the conclusion that I had gone out for the purpose of following De Louvisan and meeting him somewhere for the mere satisfaction of thrashing him. She begged and implored me to come back to the Close; to do nothing rash; to think of my father; to remember her; to be careful to do nothing that would get your name mixed up in a vulgar brawl. And she wouldn't leave me until I promised her on my word of honour that I would make no effort to find De Louvisan. When I did that, she was satisfied and went back to the Close."

In the darkness of the stone staircase Cleek puckered up his brows and thoughtfully pinched his chin.

Oho! so that was the explanation of her ladyship's presence on the Common last night, was it? Mere solicitude for the welfare of a beloved stepson, eh? Hum-m-m! Rather disappointing, to say the least of it, to find that she had no more connection with the case than just that. After all, she was merely "a red

herring drawn across the trail," eh? He shouldn't have thought so, but, of course, if young Clavering spoke the truth, that eliminated *her* from the affair altogether. Odd that she should have bribed the Common keeper not to say a word about having met her! In the circumstances, why should she have done so?

Ah, yes—just so! She wouldn't like to have the affair talked about; she wouldn't like to have young Geoff put on his guard, so that he might purposely avoid meeting her, and she would be most anxious to get him back into the house as quietly and as expeditiously as possible. No, decidedly, you never can be certain. Women are queer fish at the best of times, and mothers have odd methods of reasoning when beloved sons are concerned. But stepmothers? Hum-m-m! Yes, yes! To be sure, there are always exceptions. Still, he hadn't thought—he decidedly had not thought——

Young Clavering was speaking again. Cleek let the "thought" trail off and lose itself, and pricked up his ears to listen.

"I suppose it was her speaking of you that first put the idea into my head," Geoff went on, "and impelled me to walk over to the place where we had been so happy before your father returned from Argentina and spoiled everything for us. That's why I went. That's how I came to meet you there."

"You did not meet me there!" she flung back indignantly. "Really this is past a jest."

"A jest? You think I'm likely to jest over it—a thing that threatens the life of the girl I love? In the name of heaven, Kathie, put an end to this nonsense. You know I did meet you there! You know how surprised I was when I got to the place to see you stealing out of the gates. Why, the very moment you saw me you spoke my name, and that I had no more than just time to say to you, 'For God's sake, Kathie, how did you come here?' when you plucked me by the sleeve and said, 'Come in, come in; I'll show you something that will light the way back to the land of happiness, dear!' And after all that to face me down like this—to pretend that you were not there. It is simply ridiculous."

"I am glad you can give it so mild a name," said the girl coldly. "To me it seems the cruellest and the wickedest falsehood a man could possibly utter. Dear God! what has come over you, Geoff? Are you mad, or are you something worse, to come here and make this abominable lying charge against me—against *me?* And when you know in your heart that there is not one word of truth in it!"

"Oh, for God's sake, don't treat me as if I were a fool, Katharine. Who is there to impersonate you, and for what reason? I know what I know, I know what I've seen, what I've heard, what I've been through! Then what in heaven's name is the use of keeping up this idle pretence with me?"

"It is not a pretence—it is the truth, the simple and the absolute truth!" she replied with heat. "If

they were the last words I had to say in this world, I would repeat on the very threshold of the one to come: *I was not at Gleer Cottage last night.* I came straight from Clavering Close to Wuthering Grange, and I never left my room for one instant from that time until I came down to breakfast this morning. Ailsa Lorne was with me when I returned; she will tell you that I am speaking the truth."

Yes, decidedly Ailsa Lorne would tell him; that Cleek acknowledged to himself. Had she not done so already? But again she might also have told him that she thought she heard Lady Katharine's bedroom door open in the night and some one steal out of it. Besides, there was another thing—the golden capsule of the scent bracelet—to be reckoned with. Hum-m-m! Was there, then, a possibility that Geoff Clavering was speaking the truth, and that it was Lady Katharine herself who was lying? Of course, in that case—— Stop a bit—they were going at it again, and he could not afford to lose a single word.

"I don't care a hang what Ailsa Lorne or anybody else will say; I know what I know," young Clavering flung in doggedly. "You can't tell me that I didn't see a thing when I did see it—at least, you can't and expect to make me believe it. Give me credit for a little common sense."

"How can I when your own words so utterly refute it, when you convict yourself out of your own mouth, when even the dead man himself is a witness to the utter folly of this charge?"

"De Louvisan?"

"Yes. . He speaks for me!"

"What nonsense!"

"He speaks for me," she repeated, not noticing the interruption, "and if you will not believe a living witness, then you must believe a dead one. Uncle Raynor and Harry said this morning that the Count de Louvisan's body had been found, not lying on the ground, but lifted up and spiked to the wall; and you who claim to have seen me in that house last night claim also to have searched the place and found no one but me present. Will you tell me, then, how I could possibly have lifted the body of a man weighing ten or eleven stone at the least computation, much less have lifted it high enough to spike it to a wall?"

"One for the girl!" commented Cleek silently.

"You might have had help; there might have been somebody there who left before I arrived," replied Geoff.

"And another one for the man!" Cleek was obliged to admit. "Which of this interesting pair is doing the lying? They can't both be speaking the truth. At least, they can't unless—— By Jupiter! Hum-m-m! Quite so! Quite so! 'Write me down an ass, gentlemen,' and an ass with a capital A." Then the curious one-sided smile travelled up his cheek, and lingered there longer than usual.

Young Clavering's last remark had hurt the girl more than anything he had yet said; hurt her so

deeply that she gave a little shuddering cry and, womanlike, broke into tears.

"That is the wickedest thing of all!" she said. "The very wickedest thing of all. I can't doubt any longer that you have made up your mind to bolster up this abominable thing by every possible insult to me!"

"Insult? What funny things are sometimes said by accident!" he flung back stridently. "I am likely to 'insult' you when I'm ready to stand by you through thick and thin, am I not? And to lie till I'm black in the face, so that I keep others from knowing what I know!"

"You don't know it—you can't know it! It never happened! I was not in that house last night, and you did not see me there!"

"Oh, well then, let us say I didn't," impatiently. "What does it matter one way or the other? Say I didn't, then! Say *I* murdered him; but, for God's sake, don't say I insult you when I have come here merely to show you how much I love you—how ready I am to fight the whole world for you. Come back into my arms, and let me tell you what I want to tell, dear. Come back, and don't fear anything or anybody on earth. They shan't touch you! They shan't lift a finger to harm you, say one single word against you; and God help the first that tries it, that's all! A man doesn't cease to love a woman just because she does a desperate thing for his sake. No, not he! If he's worthy of the name of man, he

loves her all the better for it. That's how I love you! Better to-day than I ever loved you in all the days that were; better than I shall ever love anything in all the days that are to be. I don't care if you are red with the blood of a hundred men, you're the girl I love, the girl I mean to marry, the girl I'm going to stand up and fight for as long as there's breath left in my body!"

"Marry—marry?" Her voice struck through his even before he had finished speaking, and there was a sting in it that bit. "Do you think for one instant that I would marry you when you make such a charge as that against me? Do you think I would? Do you? I'd no more marry you than I would cut off my right hand, Geoff Clavering, after you have slandered me and lied about me like this."

"Kathie, dearest——"

"No—please! If you touch me I think I shall faint! Stay where you are! Let me alone! Ah, please do—please! I have suffered and suffered and suffered, but not like this; oh, never like this before! That you should say these things—you! That you should even dream of saying them! You ought to be ashamed of yourself—ashamed!"

"Kathie, darling——"

"No, no—don't, please don't; it would be wicked to touch me when I am suffering so much. I want to get back to my room—I want to lie down; my head will split if I don't. Please do not follow me; please stay where you are. I won't say a word to

anybody; I promise you I won't. I'll try to bear it, I'll try to forget it. Nine years! Dear God, nine years; and—those marks totalled nine!"

He jumped as though some one had stabbed him; a red wave rushed up and crimsoned all his face, then flashed out of existence again and left it waxen white.

"Good God! you won't attempt to suggest——" he began, then lost the power of speaking altogether, and stood looking at her with blank eyes and with colourless lips hard shut as she crept on through the shadowy dusk to where the doorway of the ruin showed a pointed arch against the dimming saffron of a twilight sky. A moment her drooping figure stood there against that shield of yellow light, pausing irresolute with one foot on the edge of the drawbridge, one hand pressed to her head; then she turned and looked back at the place where he stood. But in the dim dusk of the ruin she could scarcely see him.

"I will never speak, I will never tell—even to the day I die I won't!" she said in a whisper; then waited an instant as if expecting a reply, and getting none, added yet more sadly, "Good-bye," and went across the drawbridge to the darkening gardens, and was gone.

For a minute the man made neither movement nor sound till of a sudden there came something so totally unexpected as to cause him to literally jump. Some one had given a none too perfect representation of a muffled sneeze, telling him that he was not alone.

"Who's there? Who are you?" he cried in an excited whisper

But nobody answered.

"Do you hear what I say? Come out and show yourself, whoever you are!" he called in a slightly louder tone; and then, getting no answer this time either, he fumbled in his pocket, fished out his match box, and struck a vesta.

The glimmering light showed him what the dusk had so successfully concealed heretofore—namely, the gap in the floor and the underside of the slab which usually covered the entrance to the underground cells, but which was now laid back on its hinges with its lower side upmost and the way to the stone staircase in full view. And in the very instant he made this discovery there rolled up from that gap the sound of somebody running away.

In a sort of panic young Clavering made a dash for the trap, and was through it and down the stone steps in almost no time, the wax vesta flickering and flaring in the fingers of his upraised hand and sending gushes of light weaving in and out among the arches of the passage and the gaping doorways of the mimic cells.

Nobody in sight. He called, but nobody answered; he commanded, but nobody came forth. And with the intention of routing the author of the sneeze and the footsteps, he had just started forward to investigate the cells themselves, when the match burnt his fingers and was flung down sharply. Darkness shut in as though a curtain had fallen. He

fumbled with the box to get another match, and had almost secured one when he heard a movement behind him and flashed round on his heel.

"Anybody there?" he rapped out sharply.

"Yes; Cleek, of Scotland Yard!" answered a bland voice immediately in front of him; then there was a sharp spring, a swift rustle, a metallic click-click! His match box was on the floor, and a band of steel was locked about each wrist.

"Good Lord! you've put handcuffs on me, you infernal scoundrel!" Clavering cried out indignantly. "What is the meaning of this outrage? What are—— Here! chuck that! Confound your cheek! what are you doing to my ankles?"

"Same thing as I've done to your wrists," replied Cleek serenely. "Sorry, but I shall have to carry you, my young friend; and I can't risk getting my shins kicked to a pulp."

"Carry me? Carry me where? Good God, man! not to jail?"

"Oh, no. That may come later, and certainly will come if you are guilty. For the present, however, I am simply going to carry you to a rather uncomfortable cell at the end of the passage, and put you where you won't be able to run away. I am afraid, however, that I shall have to gag you as well as handcuff you, and make you more uncomfortable still. But I'll manage somehow to get some bedding of some sort, and to see that you don't miss your dinner. You are going to spend the night here, my

friend. Now, then, up you come and—there you are, on my shoulder. Steady, if you please, while I get out my pocket torch to light the way. I suppose you realize that I have heard all that passed between you and Lady Katharine Fordham this evening?"

"And you know that I lied, don't you?" put in Geoff eagerly. "You know that she *wasn't* there last night, after all?"

"To the contrary, my friend, I know that she was."

"It's a lie—it's a dashed lie! She never was near the place. That was pure bluff. It was I who killed the man."

"Don't tell any more lies than you are obliged to, my lad. I don't believe she killed him, and I'm not so very sure that you killed him—and there you are."

"Then what are you arresting me for?"

"I'm not arresting you; I'm simply sifting evidence. Your stepmother—according to *your* story—must be very, very fond of you, and very, very solicitous for your welfare. And if she risked catching cold and having people talk and all that sort of thing to rush out after you when you had only been gone for a short time, let's see how she'll act when you disappear mysteriously and don't come home all night!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A CHANGE IN THE PROGRAM

"I SUPPOSE you understand that this is a pretty high-handed sort of proceeding?" began young Clavering agitatedly, half indignantly. "Even the processes of the law have their limits; and to abduct a man and imprison him before there is the ghost of a charge against him——"

There he stopped; his ear caught by a faint metallic click, his eye by a little gleam of light that spat out through the darkness and made a luminous circle upon the earthen floor of the passage. Cleek had switched on his electric torch the better to see his way in carrying his captive to the cell of which he had spoken and was now moving with him toward it. His interest attracted in yet another direction, Geoffrey twitched round his head and made an effort to see the face of his captor. Pretty nearly everybody in England had, at one time or another, heard of the man, and a not unnatural curiosity to see what he was like seized upon young Clavering.

His effort to satisfy that curiosity was, however, without fruit, for the downward-directed torch cast only that one spot of light upon the floor and left everything else in the depths of utter darkness. But

that Cleek was aware of this desire upon the part of the young man and of his effort to satisfy it, was very soon made manifest.

"In a minute, my friend—have a little patience," he said serenely. "If you wanted to take me unawares you should have remembered that we must soon come to the cell and I shall have to set you down, and you could then see all that you wanted to without putting me on my guard. What's that? Oh, yes, I am frequently off it—even Argus occasionally shut all his hundred eyes and went to sleep, remember."

By this time he had travelled the entire length of the passage, and now stood upon the threshold of the cell toward which he was aiming. He was no longer careful to keep the light from illuminating the surroundings, however. Indeed, he had merely done that in the first place to prevent Geoff from seeing, as they passed, the excavation he had made and the clothing he had dug up. He now flashed the light round and round the place as if taking stock of everything. He was not, by the way; what he sought was what he had seen in each of the other cells and hoped to find here as well—the iron ring in the wall and the short length of rusty chain attached to it.

The air of antiquity had been perfectly reproduced, and this cell was as carefully equipped as its mates. He walked toward the ring the instant he saw it, switched off the light of the torch, swung Geoff down from his shoulder, unfastened his ankles and one end of the shackles that held his wrists.

"What are you going to do with me now?" demanded young Clavering with sudden hopefulness. "I say—look here—is this thing a joke after all, and are you going to give me my liberty?"

The only response was a sharp click; then Cleek's hands fell away from his captive entirely, and under the impression that he was free, young Clavering made an effort to spring up from the ground where he had been laid.

A sharp backward jerk and a twinge of the right wrist brought him to a realization that while one end of the handcuffs still encircled that wrist, the other had been snapped into the ring in the wall, and it was, therefore, impossible for him to move ten inches from the spot where he had been left.

In the utter darkness he had no means of telling if Cleek had or had not left the cell; and in a sort of panic, called out to him.

"I say, officer! Have you left me?" he asked; then hearing a sound quite close to him, a sound so clearly that of some one moving and breathing that his question was answered without words, he added nervously: "What are you up to now? What are you doing that you have to work about it in the dark?"

"Merely twisting up a handkerchief into a form of gag," replied Cleek, in a tone which clearly indicated that he was speaking with one end of that handkerchief held between his teeth. "It is not a nice thought, the idea of gagging a gentleman as if he were a murderous navvy or a savage dog that needs muz-

zling. I should much prefer, Mr. Clavering, accepting your parole—putting you on your word of honour not to cry out or to make any effort to attract the attention of anybody who may enter this ruin tonight; and if you will give me that——"

"I'll give you anything rather than undergo any further indignity," snapped Geoff. "Look here, you know, Mr. Thingamy, this is a beastly caddish trick altogether, jumping on a man in the dark and giving him no chance to defend himself."

"Unfortunately, the law cannot allow itself to study the niceties of etiquette, my dear sir," replied Cleek. "It has to go on the principle that the end justifies the means, and it must always be prepared to accept risks. I, as one of its representatives, am, as I have told you, quite ready to accept one now; so if you will give me your word of honour not to make any outcry, the gag can be dispensed with."

"Very well, then; I do give it."

"Good! And I accept it; so that's the end of that, as the fellow said when he walked off the pier," said Cleek as he ceased twisting up the handkerchief and returned it to his pocket. "But why not go farther and spare us both an unnecessary amount of trouble and discomfort, Mr. Clavering?"

"I don't know what you mean. Put it a little clearer, please. I'm not good at guessing things."

"No, you are not; otherwise you might have guessed that when Lady Katharine Fordham denied so em-

phatically what you knew to be true—— But no matter; we'll talk of that some other time."

"No, we won't!" flashed in Geoff hotly. "We'll leave Lady Katharine Fordham's name out of this business altogether. Understand that? I don't care whether you're a police officer or not, by George! Any man that tries to drag her into this affair will have to thrash me, or I'll thrash him, that's all. You can believe what you jolly well please about what you overheard. You've got no witness to prove that you did hear it; and as for me—I'll lie like a pickpocket and deny every word if you try to make capital out of it against her."

Cleek laughed, laughed audibly. But there was a note of gratification, even of admiration, underlying it; and he found himself liking this loyal, lovable, hot-tempered boy better and better with every passing moment. But the laughter nettled Geoff, and he was off like a firework in a winking.

"Look here! I'll tell you what!" he flung out hotly. "If you'll set me free from this confounded chain and come outside with me and will take a sporting chance—if you thrash me I'll take my medicine and do whatever you tell me; but if I thrash you, you're to let me go about my business, and to say nothing to anybody about what you happened to hear. Now, then, speak up. Which are you—a man or a mouse?"

"I know which you are, at all events," replied Cleek, with still another laugh. "You have some

most original ideas of the workings of the law, it must be admitted, if you think Scotland Yard affairs can be settled in that way."

"You won't come out and stand up to me like a man, then?"

"No, I won't; because if I did I should catch myself wanting to clap you on the back and shake hands with you, and wishing to heaven that I were your father. But—wait—stop! You needn't go off like a blessed skyrocket, my lad. There's still a way to do very much what you have proposed, and that I was about to mention when you tore at me about Lady Katharine. I said, if you remember, that you might go farther than simply give me your word of honour with regard to the gagging part of the matter, and might save us both a lot of trouble and discomfort."

"Yes, I know you did. Well, what of it? What trouble and discomfort can be saved?"

"A great deal if you are wise as well as loyal, my boy. It couldn't be a very pleasant experience for you to pass the night in a place like this. Nevertheless, it is absolutely imperative that you should not return to your home to-night, and that your stepmother should have no hint of where you had gone or what had become of you."

"Why?"

"That's my affair, and you will have to pardon me if I keep it to myself. Now, then, why not make matters easier and pleasanter for you and for me by

giving me your word of honour that if I let you go free from this place, and promise not to say one word of what I overheard pass between you and Lady Katharine Fordham, you will secretly journey up to London, stop there the night, and neither by word nor deed will let a hint of your whereabouts or of what has passed between us this evening get to the ears or the eyes of any one at Clavering Close? Come now; that's a fair proposition, is it not?"

"I don't know; I can't think what's at the bottom of it. Good Lord!"—with a sudden flash of suspicion—"you don't mean that you suspect that Lady Clavering, my stepmother—and just because I said she was out on the Common last night? If that's your game—— Look here, she's as pure as ice and as good as gold, my stepmother, and my dear old dad loves her as she deserves to be loved. If you've hatched up some crazy idea of connecting her with this affair simply because De Louvisan was an Austrian and she's an Austrian, too——"

"Oho!" interjected Cleek. "So Lady Clavering is an Austrian, eh? I see! I see!"

"No, you don't. And don't you hint one word against her! So if it's part of your crawling spy business to get me to give my parole so that you may sneak over to Clavering Close and play another of your sneaking abduction tricks on her, just as you have played it on me——"

"Ease your mind upon that subject. I have no intention of going near Clavering Close, nor yet of

sending anybody there. Another thing: I have not, thus far, unearthed even the ghost of a thing that could be said to connect Lady Clavering with the crime. Do you want me to tell you the truth? It is you against whom all suspicions point the strongest; and I want you to go away to-night simply that I may know if you have spoken the truth, or are an accomplished actor and a finished liar!"

"What's that? Good Lord! how can my disappearing for a night prove or disprove that?"

"Shall I tell you? Then listen. I meant at first to keep it to myself, but——" His voice dropped off; there was a second of silence, then a faint clicking sound, and a blob of light struck up full upon his face. "Look here," he said suddenly, "do you know this man?"

Clavering looked up and saw in the circle of light a face he had never seen in life before—a hard, cynical face with narrowed eyes and a thin-lipped, cruel mouth.

"No," he said, "if that is what you look like. I never saw such a man before."

"Nor this one?"

In the circle of light the features of the drawn face writhed curiously, blent, softened, altered—made of themselves yet another mask. And young Clavering, pulling himself together with a start, found himself looking again into the living countenance of Monsieur Georges de Lesparre.

"Good heavens above!" he said with a catch in his

voice. "Then you were that man—you? And Mr. Narkom knew all the time?"

"*Oui, m'sieur*—to both questions—*oui.* It shall again be I, *mon ami;* and I shall remember me last night vair well. And now since *m'sieur* shall haf so good a recollection of zis party—*voilà!* He may tell me what he remembers of this one also."

Then in a flash the face was gone, and another—changed utterly and completely—was there.

"Barch!" exclaimed young Clavering, shrinking back from the man as though he were uncanny. "And you are that man—Philip Barch, Ailsa Lorne's friend? You are that man, too?"

"Yes, I am that man, too," replied Cleek. "I have made these silent confessions that you may know—that you may understand before I make another and equally candid one. If I had chosen not to let you know the real identity of Philip Barch, you have seen how easily I could have kept that secret. Now that you know me you will understand how honestly and straightforwardly I intend to deal with you. You asked me why I wanted you to disappear for a night, and I have told you that I may prove to my own satisfaction whether you are what I hope you are, or are merely a clever actor and an accomplished liar. If what you said about your stepmother's reason for following you out upon the Common last night is as true as you would have had Lady Katharine Fordham believe, her interest in you must be an abnormal one; and if it is as great as you repre-

sent—ah, well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Not all the powers on this earth will be able to keep her indoors should you be mysteriously missing. But if it is not so great, if you have lied about that as about other things, Lady Clavering will not come out in quest of you herself, but will leave that to her husband and her servants; and I shall know then that you have simply been playing a part—that you have something to hide and some desperate reason for hiding it. Now, then, knowing what threatens, knowing what I am up to, knowing what trap has been set for you, will you give me your parole and go up to London to-night and face the issue of that act like a man?"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A CLEW FROM THE AIR

CLEEK did not have to wait for his answer.

"Yes, certainly I will," said Geoff instantly. "If there's nothing more than that behind it, I'll give you my word of honour and go this moment if you want me to do so."

"And you will say nothing, absolutely nothing, to any living soul about this—about me—about anything that has happened here?"

Young Clavering gave his promise promptly; and, with equal promptness, Cleek walked forward, unlocked the handcuff, and set him free, leading him back along the passage to the stone steps, and being careful as they passed through the cell where the murdered Common keeper's clothing lay that no ray from the torch should disclose his ghastly find. At the foot of the stone staircase he came to a halt.

"Now go," he said, "and remember that I trust you. Come back when you like to-morrow and make what explanation you please regarding your absence. I've trusted you with one or two secrets, and I will trust you with another: there's good proof, my lad, that what you said about Lady Katharine Fordham being at Gleer Cottage last night is the

truth in spite of her denial. She dropped the scent capsule from her bracelet there, and I found it a few minutes before my boy Dollops found you hiding in the hollow tree. No, no, no! Don't get excited. There's nothing in that discovery to prove the lady guilty of any part in this abominable crime. Last night I was inclined to think that that little golden globe pointed toward her having been at least a confederate; to-day I have changed my mind, and since I overheard that conversation between you two, I have come to the conclusion that it proves her absolutely innocent of any complicity whatsoever."

"But how, Mr. Barch?—I mean Cleek. You know that she was there; you know that I, too, was there. It's no use denying that since you're 'Monsieur de Lesparre' as well as what you are. You heard her deny her presence. You heard her say that she did not show me into the room where De Louvisan's body was. But she did; as God hears me, she did, though I'll never believe her guilty"—this in a last wild effort to divert suspicion from her—"whatever I might have said, whatever you may have discovered against her."

"I have just said there is nothing against her," said Cleek, with one of his curious smiles. "I have come to the conclusion that she is not a criminal, but a martyr. I don't believe she has any more idea of who murdered De Louvisan, or why, than has a child in its cradle. I know you say that she showed you into the room where the dead man's body was; but

I don't believe, my friend, that she was there. I don't believe she ever saw him again after she left Clavering Close, and I do not believe that she had the slightest idea that the man—either living or dead—was in Gleer Cottage when she led you into it."

"Then why did she lead me into it? Why did she run away and leave me there with his dead body? Where did she go? What did she mean by saying what she did about showing me something that would light the way back to the land of happiness?"

"I hope to be able to tell you all that to-morrow, my friend," replied Cleek. "Indeed, I may be able to tell it this very night; for if there is anything in the Loisette theory of recurring events acting upon a weary brain and producing similar results when—— No matter, we shall know all about that later. In spite of the fact that that scent capsule was dropped in the room where the murder was committed, and dropped before you were shown in there, as proved by the fact that you crushed it beneath your feet and carried the odour of it from the house with you, I do not believe that Lady Katharine knew one word of De Louvisan's death until the news of it was carried to her this morning. There! That's the last 'secret' I am going to let you into for the present. Now, then, off with you; and not a word to anybody before to-morrow. But one last thing"—this as Geoffrey began to run up the steps toward the open trapdoor—"if you should happen by any chance to catch a glimpse of Mr. Harry Raynor while you are in town

to-night, keep an eye on him—see whom he meets, see where he goes, and mind that he does not see you."

"Harry Raynor? I say"—eagerly—"do you think it possible that that bounder——"

"No, I don't! A worm and a snake are two entirely different things. That young gentleman never killed anything but time and the respect of decent men in all the days of his worthless life. He hasn't the necessary grit. But watch him if you run foul of him. He may know something that is worth while finding out; and, besides that, somebody or something called him away very suddenly this afternoon before I could get a chance to sound him on a most important subject. He knows a person who is very likely to be somewhere at the bottom of this case, that's all. Good-bye. And—oh, stop a bit! Just one more word: Happen to know anybody besides Mr. Harry Raynor who is addicted to the use of black cosmetic for the moustache?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, pausing halfway up the staircase, and caught by the artfulness of this apparently artless question. "Know two other men. Why?"

"Oh, nothing in particular; only that I'd like to borrow some. Who are the two men in question?"

"Lord St. Ulmer, for one."

"Lord St.—— Hum-m-m! Just so! Just so! And the other; who's he?"

"Why, my dad. Used it for years, bless his bully old heart!"

"Your—— Good-bye!" said Cleek with a curious

"snap" in his voice; then he faced round suddenly and walked back down the underground passage and left Geoff to go his way.

But if he said nothing his thoughts were busy; and this new move in the game, this new fish in the net, troubled him a great deal. He could not but remember that Sir Philip Clavering was this young man's adoring father; that he was also Lady Clavering's husband, who, as he had just heard from her stepson, was an Austrian; that the pseudo Count de Louvisan was also an Austrian, and after his unexpected appearance at Clavering Close last night Lady Clavering had had a sudden attack of illness, had left her guests at supper and retired to her own room, and afterward had gone out on the Common and had bribed the keeper not to mention having seen her.

Why did she go out? Of course that was all nonsense about her being anxious over Geoff; but, still—why? To meet some one? You never could be quite sure, quite safe, in dealing with those Continental women. After all, morality is merely a question of geography. Suppose—simply by way of argument, you know, nothing more—suppose the lady had had a love affair years before Sir Philip Clavering had met and married her? Suppose when De Louvisan turned up she had recognized in him, and he had recognized in her—— Quite so! Quite so! De Louvisan, an adventurer pure and simple, would be likely to make capital out of a hold obtained over the wife of an English millionaire. It would be im-

perative for her to see him at once and buy his silence if she could. Of course! Of course! Gleer Cottage was within easy reaching distance; Gleer Cottage was known to be absolutely deserted; and if one wanted to have a secret interview—— And to carry the hypothesis further, suppose Sir Philip Clavering, anxious over his wife's condition, should run up to her room to inquire about her, and, finding her gone, should trace her movements, go out after her, follow until he came to Gleer Cottage; and as soon as she and De Louvisan had parted—— Well, there you are! Then, too, Sir Philip Clavering was addicted to the use of black cosmetic! And the marks on the dead man's shirt front were—— Heigho! You never know! You never know! But for the boy's sake and for the sake of Narkom's fondness for both——

His thoughts dropped off. He had come again to the cell where the murdered keeper's clothes lay, just where he had flung them down when the coming of Geoff and Lady Katharine had attracted his attention and turned his interest in another direction. Now he had time to turn to them again.

If, by any chance, it really had been Sir Philip Clavering, how came these clothes buried in the grounds of Wuthering Grange? Of course the General's "ruin" was famous all over the district; and, naturally, if a man of Sir Philip Clavering's keen wits were the assassin, he would take means to get the things hidden away as expeditiously as possible, and as far away from his own place as circumstances

would permit. He wouldn't know, of course, that circumstances would arise that would point to an occupant of Wuthering Grange—Lady Katharine—being implicated and any search of the place result, and he would be quite free from wishing to lead the trail in that direction. Of course, when he learned that he had done so—as learn everybody must in a day or two—he would do his best to get rid of the things, and when that happened—— Ah, well! poor devil, it would be the end of one rope and the beginning of another.

It was an old, old trick of the assassin's, this burying things and then harking back to the spot either to remove them or to see if they were safe; and this assassin, whosoever he might prove to be, would be sure to follow the universal precedent. When he did——! Cleek bundled the clothing back into the hole, took up the spade, shovelled back the earth, and made the spot look as nearly as possible as it had been when he stumbled upon it.

"A little bit of spy work for Dollops," was his unspoken thought. "He can spend a few days down here very profitably, and be ready to give the signal when the man comes."

He put the spade back in the place where he had found it, and, facing about, went up the stone steps, and after replacing the movable slab, made his way out of the ruin; for it was now time to be about the task of dressing for dinner and what promised to be an eventful evening.

Should he take Miss Lorne into his confidence or not? Yes, he fancied that he would. For one thing, she knew Lady Clavering and he did not, and as it would be necessary for him to get out after dark and prowl about the Common to learn if her ladyship did or did not join in the search for the missing Geoff—— Hullo! What the dickens was that?

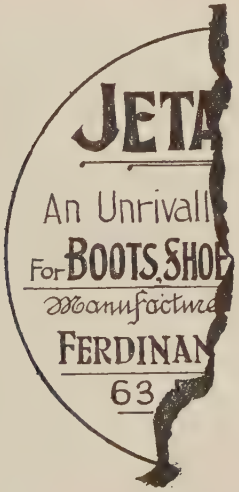
A very simple thing, indeed, when he came to investigate it. By this time he had come abreast of the house itself, and was moving along under the shadow of the deepening twilight when the circumstances which sent his thoughts off from the plans he was mapping out occurred. It was nothing more nor less than the fluttering down through the still air of a soft flaky substance, which struck him in the face and then dropped softly upon his sleeve—a small charred scrap of burnt paper. He looked up, and saw that it had fallen from other charred scraps that clung to the prickly branches of a huge monkey-puzzle tree close to the angle where a recently added wing joined the main structure of the house.

A window was above that tree, and a chimney was above that window. Hum-m-m! Second window from the angle—Lord St. Ulmer's room. What was Lord St. Ulmer burning papers for? What sort of papers had he that it was necessary for him—a supposed invalid—to get out of bed and destroy? And why in the world should he choose this particular day to do it? And a lot of paper, too, by George! judging from the quantity of charred scraps clinging to that

monkey-puzzle. What an ass the man was to burn things when there was no wind to carry off the ashes and when—— He looked down and saw one or two half-burned discs of paper, which had escaped entire destruction, lying upon the gravel of the path.

He stooped and picked one up. It was a circular white label, printed on one side and gummed on the other, just the sort of label which chemists and proprietors of patent ointments use to affix to the lids of the round tin boxes containing their wares. The thing was partly burnt away until, from being originally a complete circle, it was now merely a "half moon" of white paper with charred fragments clinging to the fire-bitten gap in it.

He turned the thing over and looked at its printed



side. Part of that printing had been destroyed, but there was still enough of it to show for what the label had been prepared.

Evidently Lord St. Ulmer had been engaged in burning labels, unused labels, that had been prepared for boxes containing a patent blacking for boots, shoes, and leather goods generally.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A BOLD STROKE

CLEEK stood a moment holding the burnt label between his thumb and forefinger and regarding it silently, his face a blank as far as any expression of his feelings was concerned. Then, of a sudden, his gaze transferred itself to one of the two other labels which, like this one, had escaped entire destruction by the fire; and carefully picking them up, he laid them inside his pocket notebook, gave

a casual, offhand sort of glance at the windows of Lord St. Ulmer's room, and then quietly resumed his sauntering walk in the direction of the house.

The twilight was now so rapidly fading that it might be said to be all but dark when he reached the main entrance to the building and found one of the footmen busily engaged in lighting up the huge electric chandelier which served to illuminate the broad hallway of the Grange. But neither the General nor any of the ladies was visible, all, as he correctly surmised, being engaged in the matter of dressing for dinner.

"Pardon me, sir," said the footman, turning at the sound of his step as he came in, "I was just about to step out into the grounds to ascertain if you might not, by chance, have lost yourself or failed to hear the dressing gong, sir. It is quite half an hour since Miss Lorne requested me to be on the lookout for you, and I was getting anxious."

"Extremely kind of you, I must say," said Cleek serenely. "But never give yourself any uneasiness upon my account so long as I remain here. I am given to taking my time on all occasions, my man. I think out all the plots of my novels prowling about in silence and alone, and an interruption is apt to destroy a train of thought forever." And having thus given the man an idea that he was an author—and accounted beforehand for any possible need for prowling about the place when the others were asleep—he went further, and gave him half a crown to salve his

injured feelings, and won in return for it something which he would have held cheaply bought at a sovereign.

"Now tell me," he went on, "why did Miss Lorne ask you to be 'on the lookout' for me? Has anything extraordinary occurred?"

"Oh, no indeed, sir," replied the footman with a full half-crown's worth of urbanity; the generosity of the gentleman had touched him on his weakest part. "You see, sir, it being the butler's evening off, and Mr. Harry having been called away before any arrangements were made with regard to your sleeping quarters, sir, Miss Lorne requested me to say that she had spoken to mistress, and you were to have any vacant suite in the house which might best meet your pleasure, sir. I was to wait here and conduct you through all the unoccupied ones in the house."

Cleek smiled. Oho! That was it, eh? Well, there was a thoughtful ally and no mistake! Knowing full well that it would be awkward for him to be put off into some inconvenient wing of the house, should he have cause to leave it secretly and to communicate with Dollops and Narkom at any time, she had taken this step to serve and to assist him. What a woman! What a gem of a woman she was!

His thoughts worked rapidly, and his mind was made up in a twinkling.

"Quite so, quite so! Very kind and very thoughtful," he said composedly. "I always prefer the second story of a building—it's a fad of mine, and

Miss Lorne recollects it. So if there are any rooms vacant upon the second floor——"

"Only one, sir, and it's the least comfortable one in the house, I'm afraid, being next to that occupied by Lord St. Ulmer."

"Lord St.—oh, ah—yes! That's the gentleman who is ill, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. That's why I spoke of it as being uncomfortable. Butler says he's a very crochety gentleman. But sick folk are always that, sir; so maybe you'd be disturbed a deal in the night."

"Hum-m-m! Yes, that is a drawback, certainly. Might take it into his head to get up and wander about during the night, and so keep one awake. Does he?"

"I couldn't say, sir; never set eyes on him since he arrived. Nobody in the house has except master and butler. Don't think he would be likely to move about much, though, sir, for I've heard his ankle's sprained and he can't put a foot to the ground. Butler always carries up his meals; at least, he has done it so far, his lordship having arrived only the night before last. Like as not I'll have to carry up his dinner to-night, this being, as I've said, sir, butler's evening off."

Cleek made a mental tally. Then if none of the servants at the Grange had seen his lordship, with the single exception of Johnston, the butler—— Quite so, quite so! His lordship wouldn't know what the other servants were like, so, of course—— He

glanced at the footman out of the tail of his eye. Livery, dark bottle-green—almost black; would pass for black in anything but a brilliant light. Waistcoat, narrow black and yellow stripes. No cords, no silver buttons. Hum-m-m! With a black-and-yellow striped waistcoat and in a none too brilliantly lighted room—and a sickroom was not likely to be anything else unless the man was too much of an ass to keep up the illusion by attending to details—an ordinary suit of evening clothes would do the trick. And he wouldn't have a doctor and wouldn't see any outsiders, this Lord St. Ulmer, eh? Oh, well—you never know your luck, my lord; you never do!

Mental processes are more rapid in the action than in the recording. Not ten seconds had passed from the time the footman ceased speaking when Cleek answered him.

"Oh, well, if it's a case like that, and his lordship isn't likely to disturb me by wandering round his room in the night, I dare say I can risk the rest, as I'm a very sound sleeper. The room's on the second floor; that's the main thing," he said offhandedly. "So you may show me to it at once."

"Very good, sir; this way if you please, sir," the footman replied, and forthwith led him to the room in question.

It was one immediately adjoining that occupied by Lord St. Ulmer, but unfortunately, having no connection with it, the wall which divided the two was quite solid. Had there been a door—— But there

was not. Cleek saw at a glance that matters were not to be simplified in that way; whoever might wish to see into that room must first *get* into it: there was no other way.

"All right, this will do; you may go," he said as soon as he was shown to the place he had chosen; and taking him at his word, the footman gently closed the door and disappeared. Cleek gave him but a minute or two to get below stairs, then slipped out on tiptoe and followed, getting out of the house unseen and running at all speed in the direction of the stables.

At the angle of the wall he stopped suddenly, and began to whistle "Kathleen Mavourneen." He hadn't rounded off the third bar before the wall door clicked and swung open, and Dollops was beside him.

"Kit bag—quick!" whispered Cleek. "Need an evening suit, and the chap who was going to lend me one went off and forgot all about it. Move sharp, I'm in a hurry."

"Right ho!" said Dollops, and vanished like a blown-out light. In half a minute's time he was back again, and the kit bag with him.

"Here you are, gov'ner. Shall I get out the evenin' clothes, and put the bag back under the hedge, or will you take it with you?"

"I'll take it. There are other things I shall want. Where's Mr. Narkom?"

"Gone back to town, sir—to the Yard. Want him?"

"No, not yet; maybe not to-night at all. Nip off

and get yourself something to eat and be back here by nine o'clock at the latest. I shall very likely need you. Cut along!" Then he caught up the kit bag, whisked away with it into the darkness, and five minutes later stood again in the room which he had so recently left.

Accustomed to rapid dressing, he got into his evening clothes in less time than it would have taken most men to unpack and lay them out ready for use when required; and then, taking the half-burnt labels from his pocketbook, carried them to the light and studied them closely. None was so big as the one which he had first inspected nor bore so much printed matter; but fortunately one was a fragment of the exactly opposite side, so that by joining the two together he was able to make out the greater part of it.

Clearly, then, the original label, making allowance for what had been totally destroyed by the flames, must have read:

JETANOLA

AN UNRIVALLED PREPARATION

FOR BOOTS, SHOES, AND ALL LEATHER GOODS

MANUFACTURED SOLELY BY

FERDINAND LOVETSKI

63 ESSEX ROW SOHO

After all, the imaginative reporter had not been so far out when he figured those mysterious markings upon the dead man's shirt bosom to read "63 Essex Row," an address where one Ferdinand Lovetski once did manufacture a certain kind of blacking for boots, shoes, etc. Not that they really did stand for that, of course, or that this ingenious person had done anything more than work out as a solution to the riddle of the marks a name and an address that were eventually to come into the case—as they now had done—but in a totally different manner from what the author of the theory intended or supposed.

Of two things Cleek was certain beyond all question of error. First: that the dead man was not Ferdinand Lovetski—not in any way connected with Ferdinand Lovetski to be precise; second: that the markings on the shirt were not made with "Jetanola" or any other kind of blacking; and ingenious as the theory was, he was willing to stake his life that those marks no more stood for 63 Essex Row than they did for 21 Park Lane. For one thing, what would be the sense of smearing them on the dead man's shirt bosom if they merely stood for that? It was all very well for that imaginative reporter to suggest that it was a sign given by the assassin to the whole anarchistical brotherhood that a debt of vengeance had been paid and a traitor punished; but the brotherhood did not need any such sign. If the man were Lovetski it would know of his death without any such silly nonsense as that. It knew the men it "marked," and it

knew when those men died, and by whose hand, too; and it did not go about placarding its victims with clues to their identity or signs of whose hands had directed the exterminating blow.

And Ferdinand Lovetski it never had "marked"—never had issued any death sentence against, never had sought to punish, never, indeed, had taken any interest in—for the simple reason that, as Cleek knew, the man had been in his grave these seven years past! He knew that beyond all question; for in those dark other times that lay behind him forever—in his old "Vanishing Cracksman" days, in those repented years when he and Margot had cast their lot together and he had been the chosen consort of the queen of the Apaches—in those wild times Lovetski, down on his luck, bankrupt through dissipation, a thief by nature, and a lazy vagabond at heart, had joined the Apaches and become one of them. Not for long, however. Within six months word had come to him of the death of a relative in his native Russia, and of a little property that was now his by right of inheritance; and he was for saying good-bye to his new colleagues and journeying on to Moscow to claim his little fortune. But the law of the Apaches is the law of the commonwealth, and Margot and her band had demanded the usual division. Lovetski had rebelled against it; he had sworn that he would not share; that what was his should remain his only as long as he lived and—it did. But five days later his knife-jagged body was fished out of

the Seine and lay in the morgue awaiting identification; Margot went thrice to see it before it went into the trench with others that were set down in the records as unknown.

That was seven years ago; and now here was Lord St. Ulmer, or some one in his room, burning labels that had to do with the days when that dead man was in honest business, and had lost it simply through dissipation after the police had discovered that 63 Essex Row was used in part as a meeting place for several "wanted" aliens, and had raided it and closed it up.

Lovetski had never belonged to the brotherhood; he had never even known that they met under that roof until the time of the raid; but he had been arrested with every other inmate of the house, held as a suspect to await examination at the hands of a magistrate, and in the meantime his business had gone to the dogs. After that drink got him, and acquaintances made in the place of detention became associates and pals. It was only a step from that to the Apaches, and from the Apaches to the Seine and the trench; and the little fortune in Russia was never claimed.

And now this Lord St. Ulmer was burning labels that once had been the property of that man, was he? And burning them at this particular period, of all others, when somebody, who evidently had some undesirable knowledge regarding him, had been mysteriously done to death and the Yard was out on the trail of the crime!

What did that mean? How did Lord St. Ulmer come into possession of those labels? And having come into possession of them, why had he suddenly become anxious to get rid of them?

What few paltry effects Lovetski had possessed when he joined the Apaches were left in the room he hired from old Marise—Madame Serpice's mother—at the inn of the "Twisted Arm." The Apaches had gone through them, and voted them not worth ten sous the lot—and very probably they were not. Still there might have been letters, and there might have been some unused labels; fellows of that sort would be apt to keep things of that kind merely to back up maudlin boasts of former standing. And if there had been, if this Lord St. Ulmer had come into possession of things that were left in the secret haunts of the Apaches—— Decidedly it would be an advantage to get a look at his lordship, and that, too, as expeditiously as possible.

A footman's waistcoat—merely that. He had one, that he knew; but was it in the kit bag? He went over and reopened the bag, and examined its contents. Good old Dollops! What strokes of inspiration the chap sometimes had! There it was, the regulation thing—the stripes, perhaps, a trifle broader than those the General's servants wore, but quite near enough to pass muster with a stranger. Now, then, upon what pretext? How? When? Hullo! What was that? The dinner gong, by Jupiter!

Certainly! The very thing. "Master wishes to know if there is any especial dish your lordship fancies, or shall I bring up just what cook has prepared?" That would do the trick to a turn; and he need be only four or five minutes late in going down to join his host and the ladies.

He whisked off his coat, waistcoat, and necktie, and made the change in a twinkling. Another and more subtle "change"—yet made even quicker—altered his countenance so completely that not one trace of likeness to Mr. Philip Barch remained. A moment later he had passed swiftly out of the room and was tapping upon Lord St. Ulmer's door.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A BLUNDER AND A DISCOVERY

CLEEK'S knuckles had no more than touched the panel before he became aware of a singular and most significant circumstance. A faint "snick" sounded upon the other side of the door, a quick, metallic "snick," which his trained ears identified at once as the switching off of an electric light; and quick as he was in opening the door, it was an utterly black room he looked into. Still, that did not dismay him. He knew full well that the button controlling the switch must be near the bed for it to be so quickly reached; and Lord St. Ulmer was most certainly *in* bed, as the creaking springs told him, and it was always within his power to make an awkward slip and, with every appearance of an accident, to switch the light on again.

But for the present—as he had thoughtfully stepped in and closed the door behind him that he might not stand there in the full glow of the lights in the outer passage, seen, but himself unseeing—for the present he was in blackness as dark as ink and as thick as tar, as far as the eye was concerned; and through that blackness the sharp staccato of an excited man's voice was flinging a challenge at him.

"Who are you? What do you want? What the devil do you mean by coming in here, unasked?" that voice rapped out with an unmistakable note of alarm in it.

"Master sent me up, your lordship," replied Cleek in the bland, deeply deferential tones of the well-trained manservant. "He is anxious to know if your lordship would prefer some especial dish prepared for your lordship's dinner, or if——"

He got no further than that, for the rasping, excited voice broke sharply in, and the violent jangling of the bed springs told that the speaker had as sharply turned over in bed.

"Your master sent you up about my dinner?" the voice trumpeted out in a sort of panic. "Sent you about my *dinner*—and by that door?"

Then came yet another sound—the jingle of a spoon or a fork against a plate or a cup—and hard after it a noise of rustling paper, and Cleek had just time to realize that he had blundered, that there must be another staircase and another door by which the servants came and went, and that, in all probability, judging from that telltale clink of metal and china, his lordship's dinner had already *been* served, when he made another and a yet more embarrassing discovery: his lordship was not alone in the room. Some one was there with him, some one who simply gave an amazed exclamation without putting it into words, then moved swiftly, snicked on the light, and scattered all the darkness with one dazzling electric glare.

In that sudden outburst of light Cleek saw a bed and a man on it, a man who had turned over, so that his face was to the opposite wall, while an open newspaper—one of many—almost covered his head. Beside that bed there was a table and a salver loaded with many dishes, and beyond that an open door, and beyond that again a gaping passage and the head of a staircase that led up from below.

And between the table and the door he saw something more startling and dismaying than all the rest.

With his hand on the switch that controlled the electric light, his head bent forward, and his small, ferret eyes brightly gleaming, Mr. Harry Raynor stood looking him in the face.

"Hullo! I say, who the devil are you?" snarled that startled and amazed young man. "What's your game? What are you up to? You're no servant in this house, dash you! You can't fool *me* on that point, b'gad! What are you doing here? What are you up to? What's your little dodge, eh?"

For the present Cleek's "little dodge" was to get out of that room as expeditiously as possible. For here was an emergency which could not be adequately met by mental finesse; a situation which could result only in exposure and the complete undoing of all his plans if he made any attempt to bolster up his claim to being one of the servants in this house, or stopped to be "interviewed" by young Raynor; and being never slow to make up his mind or to act, he did both now with amazing celerity.

Without one word of reply to young Raynor's challenge, indeed without one second's hesitation, he backed out of the door by which he had just entered, shut it sharply after him, snicked out the electric light in the passage, and dodged back into his own room with the fleet soundlessness of a hunted hare, shutting and bolting himself in with no more noise than a cat would have made in getting over a garden wall.

In a twinkling, young Raynor, although taken somewhat aback by this unexpected action, was out after him, being obliged, of course, to stop for a second and turn on the extinguished light before he could see in which direction this pseudoservant had gone, much less follow him; but by the time he had done this Cleek was safely out of sight, and was engaged in tearing off his evening clothes and bundling them back into the kit bag as fast as his hands could fly.

The turning on of the light had resulted in the discovery that the passage was empty, and in a moment there was an uproar. For no sooner had Raynor voiced one astonished "Good Lord! why, the fellow's gone—gone as clean as a whistle, blow him!" than Lord St. Ulmer began to rattle out an absolute fusillade of excited cries and frightened queries and suggestions, all snarled up in one hopeless tangle of jumbled words, and to tug with all his force at the bell rope hanging beside his bed.

"Head him off! Have him stopped! Find out

who he is and what he's up to!" he shrilled out in an excited treble, which was audible to Cleek, even through the thickness of the dividing wall. "Send for your father. Call up the servants. I want to know who that man is and what he was doing here."

If that were possible, he had certainly gone the surest and the shortest way about accomplishing what he desired, for the wild pulling of the bell rope had brought the servants flocking up by one staircase and the General and a couple of footmen dashing up by another; and for the next twenty seconds, what with young Raynor trying to give his version of the affair and his lordship excitedly flinging out his, there was confusion and hubbub enough in all conscience. Nobody had any light to shed on the mysterious occurrence, however; nobody had seen any man coming down any staircase, and nobody had the very slightest idea who that particular one could be, whence or why he had come, nor whither and how he could have gone.

It was in the midst of this confusion that suddenly the door of the room immediately adjoining his lordship's bedchamber was drawn sharply inward, and then as sharply reclosed until it left but a half foot or so between itself and the casing, and through that half foot of space the head of Mr. Philip Barch was thrust; not, however, before the General and his son and the two footmen had had a chance to see that the owner of that head was arrayed simply in his underclothing, and to understand why he had partly

reclosed the door when he found people in the immediate neighbourhood of it.

Apparently Mr. Barch was in a state of violent excitement and did not at once notice the presence of the General or his son.

"I say, dash it all! what's up? What are you bounders kicking up all this noise about? And why on earth hasn't one of you answered my ring?" he blurted out, addressing the nearer of the two footmen. "I've pulled that dashed bell rope until I'm tired. I say, nip downstairs, one of you, and tell that valet chap to bring back my clothes, and not to bother about brushing them until after I go to bed. Mr. Harry promised to lend me a suit of evenin' togs, but went off without doing so, blow him! And I haven't a blessed livin' stitch to put on!"

"Good Lud, Barch! I do beg a thousand pardons, old chap!" exclaimed the General's hopeful. "Sorry I forgot about the evenin' togs, dear boy. What a beast of a hole you'd have been in if I hadn't come back. Eh, what?"

"Well, if it could be any worse than the one I've been in for the past five minutes it would be a marvel, dear boy," responded Cleek, with lamblike innocence. "Always was a thoughtless beggar, don't you know. Took off my blessed clothes, and let your valet toddle off with 'em to brush 'em, as he suggested, before I once thought about the evenin' ones you'd promised to lend me."

"Harry's valet?" It was the General who spoke.

"Do I understand you to say, Mr. Barch, that you gave your clothes to somebody whom you took for my son's valet? In the name of reason, where did you get that impression of the man? I ask, because Harry has no special valet. Hawkins, here"—indicating the second footman—"valets both my son and myself; but having only me to look after this evening, as we did not expect Harry to return in time for dinner, he has been in attendance upon me up to the present moment, so it most certainly could not have been he."

"Oh, no; chap wasn't a bit like him, General. Wasn't like the other footman, either. Tallish chap, fair-haired, little turned-up 'ginger' moustache. Was dressed in evening clothes and wore a black-and-yellow striped waistcoat."

"That's the man! That's the man!" trumpeted forth Harry Raynor and Lord St. Ulmer in concert, the latter's excited voice ringing out from the room into which, unfortunately, Cleek could not, of course, see. "That's the identical fellow, pater; Barch has described him to a hair," went on young Raynor, addressing his father. "Sneak thief—that was his little game, St. Ulmer. Nicked my friend Barch's clothes and would have nicked yours, too, if he hadn't come a cropper. Got down the staircase there, and dodged into one of the empty rooms, I'll lay my life, pater, and as soon as you came up and left the coast clear, slipped out of the house and got away."

In the game of life chance is an important factor;

and chance, as much as anything else, favoured Cleek in this particular instance, for it was his especial aim to lull Lord St. Ulmer's suspicions of the mysterious "man" and to quiet any fear he might possess of that man's possible connection with the police. It need scarcely be recorded, therefore, that he hastened to second Harry Raynor's suggestion relative to the intruder being nothing more nor less than a sneak thief, who had taken precisely the mode mentioned of making his escape, and backed it up with a panicky sort of appeal to the General to "have the house searched and all the empty rooms below stairs looked into on the off-chance that the fellow hadn't really got away as yet."

The suggestion was acted upon forthwith. Every vacant room was searched, and it was in this matter that chance favoured Cleek so signally, for it was found that a window in one of the lower rooms had been left wide open, and as that window communicated with a veranda, from which a short flight of steps led down to the garden at a point where the walk was asphalted and could not be expected to retain a footprint, there would seem to be no question of where and how the man had made his escape.

Dinner, owing to this interruption, together with the unexpected return of Mr. Harry and the awkward position in which Philip Barch had been placed, was put back for half an hour; and Cleek, left to himself, proceeded to dress himself in the clothes with which young Raynor had supplied him. But for all his

cleverness in turning suspicion into another channel, he was not best pleased with the result of the adventure, for he was faced with the fact that he had failed to accomplish what he had set out to do, and that his efforts concerning Lord St. Ulmer had been absolutely barren of results. He had *not* succeeded in seeing his lordship's face, he had *not* succeeded in discovering how this man, of all men, should have come into possession of the Jetanola labels, or, indeed, *anything* that had belonged to Ferdinand Lovetski. Ferdinand Lovetski had been done to death in Paris only seven years ago, and his lordship had been—or was said to have been—more than twice that number of years in Argentina.

Then there was another point: What had called Harry Raynor away so unexpectedly, and what had so unexpectedly called him back? What was he doing in Lord St. Ulmer's room this evening? Was his being there merely a commonplace thing, or was there something between them? More than that, what was the connection between young Raynor and Margot? How came she to be writing letters to him, sending her photograph to him? And what was the explanation of the scrap of pink gauze that was hidden with the other things in the filled tobacco jar? The scrap of gauze which had been caught by the nail head in the passage at Gleer Cottage was pink, the same shade of pink he believed as Raynor's fragment, and neither was anything like Ailsa Lorne's frock. True, there was no stitchery of rose-coloured

silk upon that fragment Raynor had kept hidden in the tobacco jar, but that didn't prove that there was none upon the frock from which it came. It might have been torn from a part that was devoid of stitchery; and, again, it might not be part of the frock at all. It might be part of a gauze scarf that was worn with the dress. Women do wear things like that with evening gowns.

Hum-m-m! Now if the dress which Margot wore was found in time to have rose-coloured stitchery, and the pattern of that stitchery matched the pattern on the piece found in Gleer Cottage—— Yes, but what would take Margot to Gleer Cottage? Certainly it would be to meet a man; but what man? De Louvisan? But if he had been an Apache and a traitor, he would have been on his guard, and would make no appointment with her or with any of her followers.

Then what other man? Lord St. Ulmer, who, on the evidence of his muddy boots, had been out *somewhere* last night, or the fellow—whoever he might prove to be—who had killed the Common keeper and had hidden the clothing in the General's famous ruin? For, according to that unfortunate Common keeper, there had been two persons implicated in the attack upon him. What two? Margot would not fit in with any theory that implicated Sir Philip Clavering —it would be preposterous to suggest such a thing— nor did it really seem feasible to connect her with St. Ulmer either but for the fact of those labels and his

own knowledge that Lovetski had once been a member of the Apaches.

Perplexed with these thoughts, Cleek was almost startled at the sound of the second dinner gong, and he walked swiftly to the glass to note the effect of his borrowed plumes. They were certainly not a good fit, and he passed his hand over the wrinkled breast; then—his fingers stopped suddenly at the touch of something hard in the pocket. Slowly, his lips drawn to a soundless whistle, he pulled out a round metal object and looked at it with startled eyes, his thoughts in a sudden conflicting whirl.

Last night, when he had found the golden capsule with the name of Katharine upon it, and had given Mr. Narkom a brief history of the famous *Huile Violette* and the methods of the *grande dames* of old, he had declared that he knew of but one woman who ever had worn one of those antique scent bracelets, and knew of *her* wearing it simply because he himself had stolen it from a famous collection and given it to her. To-night that identical bracelet, with the scent globe and the stopper cut from an emerald, was in his hand again! Margot's bracelet in the pocket of Harry Raynor's coat! And only a moment or two ago he had asked himself, "Which man?"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SPRINGING A SURPRISE

THE circumstance was something of a shock to him. Up to this moment he had looked upon young Raynor as being merely a selfish, irresponsible wastrel, not as something vicious, something that had the courage or even the power to bite or to sting. Now, however—— He turned the bracelet over in his hand and examined it closely, to be certain before he finally decided that it really was Margot's.

The act served merely to deepen suspicion into certainty. By a dozen things he knew it for what he hoped it might not be. It was Margot's bracelet, beyond all possible question it was! So, then, he had been a fool for his pains, had he—a fool taken in and gulled by appearances, eh? And the creature he had fancied a mere worm was, after all, a serpent and—dangerous!

Margot's bracelet in the pocket of Harry Raynor's evening coat was something rather more significant than Margot's picture and Margot's letters in Harry Raynor's tobacco jar, for an evening coat consorted well with an evening frock, and some woman who was not Ailsa Lorne, nor yet Lady Katharine Fordham,

had worn an evening frock at Gleer Cottage last night.

Where was Harry Raynor last night? That, too, would want looking into in the light of present events. And possessing two evening suits, which had that interesting young gentleman worn yesterday? This one, which he had lent to Cleek, or the one he would himself wear at dinner to-night? A great deal would depend upon that point—as great a deal as sometimes sends men to the gallows. For whensoever he had last worn this suit, this bracelet was put in the pocket of it. Upon that point there could be no shadow of doubt; for although he had forgotten all about the thing—as evidenced by his leaving it in the pocket when sending the clothes to Cleek—he could not possibly have put this coat on again without noticing how abominably the thing sat upon the wearer, and discovering the cause of it.

And if he had worn this particular suit last night, and Margot could be proved to have visited Gleer Cottage at, or about, the time of the murder—— Cleek shut off that train of thought, and puckered up his lips until they were white and full of creases, and sighed inwardly, thinking of the loving mother and of the added cross for the shoulders of the bitterly disappointed father, a man and a hero, a soldier and a gentleman, cursed with such offspring as this!

"And the little beast would sacrifice the pair of them for the price of a night's orgy, and turn suspicion even against his mother to save his own skin if

he were in danger," was his unspoken summing up of Harry Raynor's character. "Gad, how little there is in heredity, after all, when we so often see eagles breeding jackdaws and lions bringing forth mice!"

The dinner gong sounded again; and it was only then that he realized how long a time he had spent mooning over a stolen bracelet and a gnat that seemed suddenly to have grown into a bird of prey.

He turned round on his heel and switched off the light. "A bombshell for *you*, my laddie!" he said in the soundless words of thought, as he put the bracelet into the tail pocket of his coat and nodded as if young Raynor were there in person to be addressed; then he walked out and shut the door behind him, and went down to the business of dining.

He found the General and his son and Mrs. Raynor and Ailsa awaiting him in the drawing-room, and was not—considering what he now knew—at all surprised to learn that Lady Katharine had developed a bad headache, gone to bed, and wished no dinner at all.

"I can't think what's come over her," said Ailsa when she made this announcement.

"Oh, can't you?" said young Raynor with a cackling laugh. "Lord! women don't look far beneath the surface of things, do they, Barch? Who wouldn't go to bed with a headache after a visit from a goat like Geoff Clavering?"

"Harry, dearest, do think what you are saying, and before whom, darling!" bleated apologetically his

adoring mother. "You mustn't mind him, Mr. Barch; he *is so* full of spirit, the dear boy."

Cleek did not reply, neither did the General. Possibly both were secretly battling with a desire to catch hold of this young man and to kick him as far as the human foot could propel him; and it was, no doubt, a relief to all when the two footmen swung open the great double doors leading into the dining-room and announced gravely that dinner was served.

With the matter of that dinner it is doubtful if anybody but Cleek really enjoyed the hour spent in consuming it, and even he merely because the girl of his heart was beside him, and *that* would make a heaven with any healthy and well-conditioned man in the universe. But it was certain that nobody was deeply regretful when the end came, and Mrs. Raynor, rising, gave the hint to Miss Lorne that it was time to return to the drawing-room and to leave the gentlemen to their half hour with the coffee, the liqueurs, and the cigars. But to-night the General would have none of these.

"Young men to young men's pleasure, gentlemen. I'm an old fogy, and I'm sleepy," he said immediately after the ladies had retired. "Besides, my monthly copy of the *Gardener and Fruit Grower* arrived this evening, and I haven't looked at it yet. So, if you will excuse me, Mr. Barch——"

"My dear General, pray make no apologies," said Cleek, struggling between the necessity for keeping up his rakish attitude and the desire to be a man in

the eyes of this rugged old soldier, who was fighting a braver battle now than he had ever fought in the days when king and country called him. "If a man may not consider his personal convenience in his own house, what's the good of saying that an Englishman's home is his castle?"

"Ah, we outlive old notions, Mr. Barch, we outlive them!" replied the General with a kindly smile and something that was like a smothered sigh. "Pray make yourself thoroughly at home, however. I hear from Harry that you have decided to honour us with a week's visit, and I am very greatly pleased. Hawkins, in the absence of Johnston, see that the gentlemen want for nothing."

"Very good, sir. Serve your coffee in your study, sir?"

"No, I shan't take any. See that I'm not disturbed; and don't bother to valet me to-night; I shall be reading late. Good-night, Harry; good-night, Mr. Barch." And with that he walked out of the room and left them.

"Now, then, Hawkins," said young Raynor as soon as his father was fairly out of sight and sound, "set the decanters and the glasses on the table here, and you and Hamer clear off about your business as fast as you can toddle. We don't need you. Hook it!"

"Very good, sir," replied Hawkins deferentially, and obeyed the order to the letter.

Harry Raynor waited a moment to give both time to leave the room and to get beyond earshot, then

caught up a decanter, drew a glass toward him, and poured out a stiff peg of brandy.

"I say, Barch, I've got a flea to put into your ear," he said earnestly, "and I didn't want those blighters hanging round to hear it; that's the reason I packed them off as I did. I'm going to give you a shock that will set you thinking."

"Are you?" said Cleek with the utmost serenity. "Well, I'm going to give *you* one, too, dear boy; and as first horse at the post wins—I say, what price this little caper? How did you come by this, dear boy—and when?"

He dipped round and down into his coat-tail pocket, as he spoke, pulled out the scent bracelet, and laid it on the table before him.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

PICKING UP THREADS

YOUNG Raynor was not in the smallest degree upset at sight of the thing. He was mildly surprised, and expressed it by a low, soft whistle as he reached out his hand and took up the bracelet.

"Well, of all the mutton heads! Shows what a thoughtless beggar I am!" he said with a slight lurch of the shoulders and an impatient twitch of the head. "No need to ask you how you came by the blessed thing, dear boy. Found it in the inside pocket of that coat you're wearing, I know. That's where I put the bally thing, I recollect. What an ass of me to forget all about it. Hope she won't think I've bagged it."

"She?" said Cleek, with admirable composure, considering that this open admission, this evidence of there being nothing to conceal, threatened to upset all his calculations. "Antecedent of that personal pronoun, please; who may the 'she' in question be?"

"Why, Mignon, of course."

"Mignon?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle Mignon De Varville, the

famous Whirlwind Dancer of the Paris Variétés. *You* know her, or ought to, considering that you got a peep at her phiz in spite of me this afternoon."

"Not 'Pink Gauze'? The lady of the tobacco jar?"

"The very identical. Little bit of all right, that—eh, what?"

"Looked like it, at all events," said Cleek, selecting a cigar and lighting up. "What a lucky beggar you are, dear chap—all the good things seem to go your way. And so"—puff! puff!—"Pink Gauze gave you the bracelet, eh? When? Last night? Or didn't you see her then?"

"Oh, I saw her last night, right enough; in fact, I've seen her pretty nearly every night since she came over from Paris, but she didn't give me the bracelet to take care of *then*. *That* was on the night before—over at her little place, you know."

"No, I'm blest if I do. How should I? Never saw or heard of her, dear boy, till I had the misfortune to break that tobacco jar and tumble out her photo. So her name's Mignon de Varville, is it? And she's got a little place of her own, eh? Where? In this neighbourhood?"

"Lord, no! Beyond Wimbledon. Rippin' little place, too. Clinkin' little house standing in its own grounds and fitted up to the nines. Took it furnished, and gives the rippin'est suppers and the jolliest dances going. Hot stuff, I give you *my* word. Brought over her entire troupe with her. Rehears-

ing now, and with all their evenings to themselves. Going to open in London in a fortnight's time, she says, and no English hotels for *her* and her little lot. There are ten of 'em: five spiffin' pretty girls, and five of the most awful-lookin' Johnnies you ever saw in evening clothes since the hour you were christened. Coarse as dog's hair, every mother's son of 'em, but clinkin' good chaps, for all that. Plenty of champagne, and jolly good champagne it is, too, dear boy; and after supper there's always a dance, two of the chaps and two of the girls sitting out and furnishing the music. And Lord, you don't know what a dance is, Barch, till you've had one with Mignon de Varville, my boy!"

Cleek did not dispute the assertion. He had had many with the lady in those old days that lay forever behind; and it needed no man's word to tell him how tirelessly, how joyously, and with what mad *abandon* Margot could dance when the fever of music and wine got into her blood.

"My hat! I'll be choking you from sheer jealousy, presently, you lucky beggar!" he said enviously. "All the plums seem to fall over on *your* side of the wall, dash you! and here am I sitting solitary and alone in a howling wilderness with not even *one*. I say, how the dickens did you ever come across this French lot? Blest if I can seem to meet with *any* —French, English, or any other sort, dash it! Where did you meet the charming Mignon? In Paris?"

"No fear! You can fall in with anything going

in London if you only know the ropes, dear boy, and are popular. Flossie Twinkletoes introduced me to her. She'd just come over from Paris, and Flossie was out of work through the failure of 'The Seaside Girl,' and asked me to take her to supper and meet a friend of hers. I did—and the friend was Mignon. After that—well, you know how it is, dear boy. When a fellow knows his way about women *will* run after him. Mignon and I took to each other from the first, and we've been jolly good pals ever since. Invited me to her place before we'd known each other half an hour. Fact, dear boy. And she's rather exclusive, too, I can tell you. Just *how* exclusive you may guess when I tell you that I'm the only living man outside of those who belong to her troupe that ever sees the inside of her house or shares one of those rippin' evenings there."

The curious one-sided smile travelled up Cleek's cheek, hovered there a moment, and then disappeared. He said nothing upon the subject, but it was perfectly clear to him just *why* Mr. Harry Raynor was the only stranger present. He knew Margot and he knew her methods. This one man was desirable because she had an especial use for him; and he meant to make it his business to find out just what that especial use might be. So, then, she had abandoned her customary tactics for once, and had brought some of the female members of her crew to England with her, had she?

The murder of De Louvisan looked more than ever

like an Apache crime, in the light of these things. But *why* an Apache crime? Margot's game was always money; and the pseudo Count de Louvisan had not a shilling to bless himself with. Again, if it were an Apache crime, how came a man who was undeniably Lord St. Ulmer—undeniably everything that he claimed—to be mixed up in the affair to such an extent as he was? And what of Lady Clavering? Where did she come in? What had taken her out upon the Common last night? What of young Geoff? What of his father? And what, of all things, about Lady Katharine Fordham?

None of these people could be connected with Margot—with the Apaches. He had his own ideas relative to Lady Katharine's part in the puzzle, but there was still that bundle of buried clothing, still the fact that it was found in the grounds of Wuthering Grange, and that it was highly improbable either Margot or any of her crew could have put it there. Still, Margot had a purpose in "catching" Mr. Harry Raynor; and if—— Ah, well, you never can tell. Shallow-looking pools are sometimes very deep. Which, then, *was* Mr. Harry Raynor: the brainless fool he appeared, or a very excellent actor playing a very cunning part?

During the moment it had taken for these thoughts to travel through his mind, Cleek's whole attention seemed to be claimed by his cigar, which, for some unknown reason, appeared to have an objection to draw. Now, however, he flung the thing aside.

"Pardon me, dear boy, if I have seemed inattentive," he said. "Please go on. What was it you were saying? Oh, ah! I recollect: about your being the only guest that Mademoiselle What's-her-name ever asks to her blessed kick-ups. Lay you a tanner I can tell you why, old chap."

"Can you? Then why?"

"Either she's clean gone on you—which, no doubt, is very likely—or she's trying to get something out of you. Ever give you what our Yankee cousins call the touch? Ever try to get anything out of you?"

"Not a blessed rap. Never wanted *anything* from me. That is, anything in the money line, I mean. Hinted pretty strongly at something else, however; but, of course, I wasn't taking any on *that* score!"

"Weren't you? Why not?"

"Don't be an ass, Barchie! You've seen the pater and mater, and you can judge for yourself just how impossible it would be to even hint at having a girl like Mignon asked over here to dinner one night just simply because she has, as she says, an intense yearning to see how people of the better class in England live and conduct themselves in their own homes."

Cleek reached for another cigar and lit it. Oho! so that was how the cat jumped, was it? That was Margot's little game, eh? She had taken up with this engaging young man merely for the purpose of getting an entrée to Wuthering Grange. Clearly, then, there must be something or some one under the roof

of this house that she desired to get in contact with; and having failed to get *invited*, as she had hoped—— Yes, of course! Cunning of her, diabolically cunning. Forgotten all about the bracelet, eh? Not she! He knew her like a book. It would be an excuse to come over in person to ask for its return. "So sorry; but called away suddenly, and couldn't possibly wait for you to bring it back." That sort of thing, and—well, there you are. Ah, she was the very embodiment of craft and cunning, that lady: cut her off at one door and she would make her way round to the other.

"Wasn't aware that it was anything of that sort, dear chap, or I shouldn't have asked," said Cleek, responding with the utmost serenity to young Raynor's remark. "Of course you couldn't do anything of that sort, so it was deuced wise of you to ignore the hint. Rum what fancies women of that sort have, eh? And how blessed crafty they are in getting what they want! You look out, dear boy, that she doesn't come over here after that bracelet. Lay you a sov that's why she got you to take charge of it."

"Lay you another it isn't," replied the young man, with a smile of confidence. "You don't know the facts, dear boy, or you wouldn't jump to such silly conclusions. She gave it to me because the blessed thing would keep coming undone and falling off and interfering with our waltzing. Besides, it wasn't she —it was I—that suggested that I should put it in my pocket for safe keeping until the dancing was over;

and, like a blithering idiot, you see, I forgot all about it. Blessed lucky thing for me that I had to lend you a suit of evening clothes, b'gad, or I might not have found the bracelet for heaven knows how long."

"And a blessed lucky thing for me that you turned up in time to lend it to me," said Cleek, in reply. "Never was in such a beastly funk in all my life, dear chap. Could have said a prayer, if I knew any, I was so blessed glad when I looked out and saw you standing in the passage. I say, how did you come to be there, Raynor? Thought you were heaven knows how far away, and blest if I can think where you came from."

"Popped out of St. Ulmer's room. Next one to yours. Was in there when that sneak thief appeared."

"In there? My hat! What a rum idea! Thought you didn't care for the old josser. At least, you spoke as though you didn't this afternoon; and to have you sitting in there and kow-towing to a gouty old sick man——"

"Wasn't sitting in there, dear boy. Had just popped in on my way up to dress. Evening papers full of that business at Gleer Cottage last night. Bought several of them at the railway station. Happened to think that, maybe, the old bounder hadn't read the news and would be interested in it, so just dropped in to give them to him. That was all."

"Oh, I see," said Cleek. "That accounts for it,

of course. Wondered how the dickens you came to be there, and what on earth had called you back home so early after you'd told me not to expect you until twelve. By the way, dear boy, what did call you back, if it isn't an impertinence to ask. Needn't bother to reply if you'd rather not." This latter, for the reason that at the mention of his coming back earlier than expected, young Raynor's lips had come together in a sharp, hard, narrow line, and his eyes had assumed an absolutely savage expression. "Sorry if I've poked my nose in where I'm not wanted, old chap, deuced sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," said Raynor, reaching for the decanter and pouring out a fresh peg of brandy. "Don't bother about treading on *my* corns. Of course I'm a bit sore on the subject, but—well, I like you, Barch; I like you no end. Besides, I was going to tell you, anyhow. Remember, don't you, that I said I was going to give you a shock?"

"Oh, ah! Yes. Blest if I hadn't forgotten. And I thought I was going to give you one, too, about the bracelet; but it didn't come off. Maybe yours won't either, dear boy."

"Oh, don't you make any mistake upon that score. Lay you a fiver it makes you sit up when I spring it on you. Shove that siphon over this way, will you, dear boy? Thanks, very much. I say, Barch—chin'-chin', old chap!—I say, you want to know what sent me back so unexpectedly, do you, eh? Well, you may."

"May I? Thanks. Then what did?"

"Same thing that called me away in the first place —a blessed swindle!"

"The dickens you say? What sort of a swindle, old chap, eh?"

"A forged letter. Somebody wanted to get me away from this house for some purpose or another, and to *keep* me away until late to-night, too. I don't know why, and I don't know what for, but I'm jolly well certain who the party is, b'gad; and it's a howlin' eye-opener, I give you *my* word! Wait a bit!"

He got up suddenly, walked to the door, opened it a foot or so, peeped out, then reclosed it and walked back to his seat. He poured out a third brandy, and drank it almost neat this time, then put his elbows upon the table, and, leaning forward, looked straight into Cleek's eyes.

"Barch, I've discovered something," he said in a lowered voice. "My father's playing a double game. He's a damned old two-faced hypocrite, that's what, and I've found him out at last!"

The cigar dropped suddenly from Cleek's fingers, and he ducked down in quest of it. He simply *had* to have some excuse to cover up the state of his feelings, or they would have got the better of him. A while ago he had said to himself that the fellow was despicable enough to implicate his own parents if it were necessary to save his skin; but even then he had only half believed it; now, however, he knew, and a fierce indignation bit into the very soul of him.

The worm had suddenly developed into a viper.

He went on groping for the dropped cigar. He might have found it at once had he chosen to do so, but he did not. It needed a moment or two to whip his savage desires into subjugation, to get himself well in hand again that he might face this unnatural son without giving way to the temptation to thrash him; and all the while his head was whirling with the crushing recollections that were crowding into it.

If it were worth his while—to save his own skin, to divert suspicion from himself—— Well, was it not worth his while now? The chase was narrowing, and perhaps he knew it—one could not be certain what such a man *would* find means of discovering. Perhaps he knew of the unearthing of the buried clothing. Perhaps he knew that there was proof the murderer had been traced to Wuthering Grange, and knowing, realized the necessity for diverting suspicion from himself, if he were guilty? But, guilty or innocent, principal or accessory, this one thing was certain: last night a murder had been committed; last night a dead man had been spiked to the wall in true Apache fashion; and this Mr. Harry Raynor, who was casting slurs upon his own father, was hand and glove with the Apache queen!

CHAPTER TWENTY

"HOW SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH"

CLEEK found his cigar at last, and rose with it in his hand, leaving young Barch to finish his story in his own inimitable way.

"Yes," he continued, "what I call a regular facer for me. I was swindled into going away by a forged letter, which I swear he wrote himself. Recollect, don't you, that when you came to meet me at the ruin, I told you I'd suddenly been called away? Well, so I had. While I was waiting there at the ruin for you to get shot of that muff Geoff Clavering and come to join me, up walks the pater and hands me a letter—a typewritten letter, mark you—with word that a messenger had just brought it. Now listen to this closely, Barch! Last January some fool of an editor suggested to my pater that he should write a series of articles upon the proper cultivation of hot-house fruits for his tomfool paper, and said that typewritten copy was absolutely necessary. Out goes the pater and buys a typewriter, and engages a girl to operate it. Got her from some typewriting school in town, and a rippin' fine little girl she was, too! Name, Katie Walters. Pretty as a picture and lively as a cricket. Well, Katie and I became jolly good pals.

Pater found it out, and then just what you might have expected happened. I got a lecture, and Katie got the sack and was packed off to town before I could get a private word with her. Now, the letter my father handed me this afternoon was supposed to come from that girl."

"And didn't?"

"No, it didn't. It asked me to run up to town and meet her just outside the typewriting school when the day's work was over. I went, but I didn't do exactly as I'd been asked. I suppose the party that wrote it hoped that I'd wait there until dark, and that when she didn't come out I'd come to the conclusion that I'd missed her, and, being in town, would probably go somewhere else and make a night of it, as I most likely should have done under ordinary circumstances. But I didn't feel like waiting round for that bally school to close; so as soon as I got there, I walked upstairs and asked to see her."

"Humph! And she wasn't there?"

"No, she wasn't. And what's more, she hadn't been there for weeks and weeks. Had got a position up in Scotland, and is going to be married to a bank clerk next month."

"Oho!" said Cleek, "I see! I see!"

He walked over to the other side of the room, where there was a huge potted azalea on an ebony pedestal. He had admired and he had examined that azalea earlier in the evening, so it was, perhaps, only natural that he should be attracted by it now. Still, for once

in a way, it was not the blossoming beauty of the plant that lured him to it, much as flowers always had and always would appeal to him. He could see the trend of young Raynor's tale now, the dim, shadowy outline of the argument he was putting forth, the suspicion he was endeavouring to lead; and he was afraid that something in his face or his eyes might betray the true state of his feelings if he remained there in the bright light for the man to study him. The big azalea offered the refuge of shadow. He walked there and stood in the shade of it, and began idly poking at the earth in the huge pot.

"Naturally, dear boy," he went on, "when you heard that you knew that you had been taken in."

"So I did, on the instant," said young Raynor, tackling yet a fourth glass of brandy. "It was as plain as the nose on your face that somebody had tried to spoof me; somebody had an interest in sending me off to town on a wild-goose chase and getting me out of this neighbourhood to-night, and that that somebody hadn't reckoned upon my doing what I did, and didn't know about my having promised you to take you to see Mignon de Varville, when that blithering letter intervened. And speaking of that—I say, Barchie, we'll go to-night, if you like—eh, what?"

"Sorry, dear boy," said Cleek, whose intention was to get out on the Common to-night and test the truth of Geoff Clavering's story; "sorry, but I'm afraid we'll have to put that off until to-morrow. Thinking you weren't coming back in time, I arranged with the

ladies for an evening of bridge; so, if you don't join us, you'll have to pay your respects to 'Pink Gauze' to-night without me. And, by the way, how did you get that bit of pink gauze, old chap? Any particular significance attached to it?"

"Lord, no! Bit of gauze scarf she wore the other night—always wears pink, by the way—caught in my watch chain. Tore in gettin' loose, and I kept the bit as a memento."

"Ah, I see. Well, get on with the other subject; I'm immensely interested. As soon as you'd found out that Katie What's-her-name couldn't have written the letter, and that you'd been deceived by somebody, then what?"

"Why, then I put back home by the first possible train. I had my suspicions—yes, rather—so I came back to prove them true."

"And did you?"

"Ah, didn't I? Nobody knew of my affair with Katie outside of my father, and my father has a typewriter ready to hand, and typewriters don't betray anybody's 'fist.' I went to the lodgekeeper. No messenger had passed him to-day. I went to Hawkins and Hamer. No messenger had brought any letter that they knew of to the house. I couldn't ask Johnston, because this is his evening off; but no doubt that when I do ask him he'll say the same. Well, now, you put all those things together, Barch, and see for yourself what they make. As nobody but my father knew anything about the girl, and

nobody gave him a letter, and he has a typewriter ready to hand, why there you are. He wrote the letter, that's what. And if he wrote it to get me away and keep me away until late at night, why he's got a devilish good reason for it; and if he has got a reason for doing things at night that he doesn't want other people to know about and doesn't want his own son to discover, then he's playing a double game. And last, when a man sets himself up for a howling saint in the virtue line and yet plays a double game, why he's a rotter and a hypocrite, whether he's my father or not, and I'm not going to stand it." He nodded with drunken solemnity. "I'm going to have it out with him to-night, you'll see. Come with me if you like——"

"Not I, old man, I've promised to join the ladies, see you later, eh?" said Cleek, and with a look of unseen contempt at the drink-sodden figure, he turned abruptly and left the youth to continue his potations at his own sweet will.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

WHEN TWO AND TWO MAKE FOUR

IT WOULD not be overstating the case if one were to say that Cleek's mind was absolutely in a whirl when he closed the door of the dining-room behind him and stood alone in the brilliantly lighted hall; for, added to the loathing contempt he felt for the young reprobate he had just left, there was the knowledge that this new and unexpected development threatened to destroy the whole fabric of his theories in almost every particular.

Not for one moment, heretofore, had he looked upon young Raynor as other than a shallow, empty-headed wastrel; a mere cuckoo hatched in an eagle's nest; a thing to be scorned, not dreaded; a mere mischievous atom that hadn't the courage to be a bird of prey, nor blood enough in its veins to be dangerous. Now, however—— God! what a riddle life is! You never know!

The door that led out into the grounds of the Grange was but a rope's cast distant. He felt that he couldn't trust himself to go in and face the ladies just yet a while; that he must think over this new and staggering turn which events had taken: think over it for a time in the hush and darkness of the

outer world; and, turning on his heel, went swiftly to the door and let himself out.

By this time the night had closed in, the moon had risen, and the gardens were simply a shadowy place of dark and fragrant mystery, with here and there a silver arabesque on the earth where the moonlight shafted through the boughs of trees, and here and there a streak of yellower radiance where the windows of the house threw man-made light across the lawn and against the massed green of crowded leaves. Cleek took to the grass that his footsteps might not be heard, and there, in the darkest shadow of all the darkened land, walked up and down, up and down, with his lower lip pinched up between his thumb and forefinger, his brows knotted, and the elbow of one arm in the hand of the other: a quiet, slow-moving figure, as silent as the other soundless shades that were about it.

So that was how the cat jumped, was it? Directing suspicion—not openly, not with any positive hint of *what*, but with deadly seriousness, considering that last night a man had been mysteriously murdered and the police were out for the assassin—directing suspicion against his own father, and at such an appallingly significant time.

What a cur the fellow was! Even if his father could in any way have been implicated in the crime, by any means, upon any pretext, what a devil's act it was to lead the law into the right channel. But when there was not one solitary circumstance that

pointed, when it was merely to save his own skin, merely to divert suspicion away from himself, what an act of unspeakable atrocity! Couldn't the fellow reason? Couldn't he see that the very thing he was doing to mislead justice was the one circumstance which directed its sword against himself? That the simple fact of his endeavouring to direct suspicion against one who was in no way implicated was absolute proof that he had a purpose in wishing it to be misdirected. And if he *had* a purpose in doing that, the inference was so obvious that a child might read between the lines.

Heigho! It was just another exemplification of the truth of the old adage that "when the wine's in the wit's out." If he'd let that brandy decanter alone, if he hadn't fuddled his reason and clogged his wretched brain with alcohol, he must have seen what an ass thing he was doing, and what a fool his loosened tongue was making of him.

True, as yet there did not seem any just cause for connecting him with the murder of De Louvisan, any reason why he should have killed the man; any single purpose he might serve, any solitary thing he might gain by slaying him; but still—— Oh, well, you never know how deep a well is until you have reached the bottom of it. The thing had every appearance of being an Apache crime, and he was "in" with Margot—Margot, who played for money and money alone; so if—— Good God! the little reptile hadn't let her lead him into *that* folly, had he? Hadn't let

her lure him into taking the oath and enrolling himself a member of the Apache?

If he had been mad enough to do that, if that were the explanation, why, then, all the rest was possible. The law of the Apache is the law of the commonwealth; and he would find that out, as Lovetski had found it out—too late. If St. Ulmer was in any way implicated, St. Ulmer's fortune would be *one* stake. And if this brainless weakling should fall heir to his father's money, ho! there was the other "stake"; there the possible motive, there the first connecting link!

Was that Margot's little game? Was that the way the idiot had been tricked into becoming an accomplice? Just so! let's put the jumbled bits together and see if they fit; let's sum up two and two and learn if they really do make four.

First bit: De Louvisan with such a hold upon St. Ulmer that he can compel his lordship to cancel his daughter's engagement and force her to accept him as a fiancé. Quite so! Second bit: De Louvisan, without any rupture occurring between himself and St. Ulmer, suddenly murdered in cold blood. And not only murdered, but spiked up to the wall after the manner of Lanisterre and other traitors to the Apache. A clear proof that this De Louvisan himself was an Apache; and being a traitor to the cause—— Quite so! quite so! Prevented from marrying Lady Katharine, because that was not part of the agreement; because he was making

an effort to obtain for himself and his own personal use a fortune which it was intended should come into the commonwealth. Hum-m-m! Those two pieces seem to fit together. Now for the next:

If St. Ulmer, over whom this De Louvisan undoubtedly had a hold of some sort, bought that fellow's silence by promising him his daughter for a wife, then it is quite certain that he was acquiescing in his traitorship to the Apache and quite willing that the man should have Lady Katharine's dower for himself. That bit fits also. Now for another: if in doing that thing this De Louvisan merited the name of traitor, it must have been that he came between the Apache and the possession of the St. Ulmer fortune, and if the owner of that fortune had to make terms such as he did with the man, the inference is as plain as the nose on your face. In other words, St. Ulmer, too, had reason to dread the Apache, and there must, therefore, be some connection between him and Margot. Two and two—and it makes four exactly! St. Ulmer, then, is the game, St. Ulmer the pivot upon which the whole case revolves.

Where, then, does young Raynor come in? Hum-m-m! Ah! Of course, of course. Very crafty, very crafty indeed. A beautiful woman could do anything in the world with such a worm as he. The stage-door Johnnie will be best caught by a chorus girl. Yes, yes, just so. Get one who is out of an engagement or in debt—anything that will make her

willing and eager to accept a bribe. She will do the introducing; the rest you can do yourself. Easy enough with such an ass as that fellow. Lovely women and jolly chaps for companionship; a lonely house, music, dancing, champagne; a famous French variety star heels over head in love with him, letters, photographs, nights of revelry, and quarts of wine; and then—*voilà*, the fish is hooked!

Sworn in, by heaven! sworn in in a drunken fit, to wake and find himself not only an Apache, but to have his vanity tickled, his empty head turned, and his love of being thought a regular ladies' man pampered to the full by being told that he is in reality the *king* of the Apaches, and that hundreds and hundreds of just such jolly fellows and girls as he sees about him are willing and eager to do the little worm homage and to be ruled by him as though he were actually royal.

It is an old, old game of yours, that, isn't it, Margot? So you have caught many a fool in your day, wiser fools than this one, and sillier, too, in their way, but none of them ever held his kingship beyond the space of a month; none at all but that bolder rascal, the Vanishing Cracksman.

And this little maggot of a Harry Raynor is the latest dupe, eh? Hooked in a drunken moment, the silly gudgeon, hooked that you may get at St. Ulmer and—get even—with the chap called De Louvisan. It must have been a shock when you found what a cowardly cur the fellow is at heart.

Still there must be an accomplice, and there must be a strong incentive to command the services of this one.

How did you work it, then? How get him to assist in that thing, if he did assist? How lead him up to this abominable act regarding his own father? Yes! To be sure, to be sure. Help you and your crew to St. Ulmer's money and you'd help him to *his*: to be rid of a father who kept him upon a short allowance, who disapproved of all the things and all the people he cared for, and who treated him as though he were a little foolish boy instead of a great, noble, splendid man, who ought to be free to live like the king he was.

Oh, it would be easy: just the mere turning of suspicion after the other thing was done. A letter would do that—a forged letter—and that would be prepared for him nicely. Oh, no, no! of course he wouldn't be hanged. Means would be provided to prevent that. He would be so deeply compromised, however, that there would be no possibility of his escaping but by death, and the means of bringing that about would be conveniently supplied him. A swift but painless poison; or, perhaps, a bottle of ether—something of the sort. No pain, no suffering; all over in a minute or two; then "darling Harry" would come into everything, and the clever little forged letter would explain everything away.

Would it? Cleek's jaws clamped together as the thought came. Would it, indeed? Well, *he'd* see

that it wouldn't, then! If any one was to suffer it should be the guilty, not the innocent; they should never pull that game off to the end of time.

The forged letter, eh? Ah, be sure that Harry Raynor would take means to preserve it and to have it handy against the time of need. And be sure, too, that Margot would instruct him with the utmost carefulness just how to act with regard to it, and just where to keep it in order to make everything appear natural and in accordance with what he was to tell to his friend, Mr. Barch, in order to set the ball rolling. Claimed to have received it this afternoon, didn't he? So, of course, it would be in the pocket of the coat he had worn at the time. Had to change into evening clothes for dinner, and was in evening clothes still. So, of course——

The thought had no more than shaped itself in Cleek's mind before he put it into action. As swiftly and as soundlessly as he had left the house he now returned to it. But whereas he had gone out unsuspected and unseen, it now became manifest that he was not to be permitted to enjoy the same privilege in returning, for as he stepped into the hall he came face to face with Hawkins advancing from the direction of the servants' staircase.

"Out for another ramble in quest of a new plot you see, Hawkins," he said gayly as he entered. "The woes of the novelist are many when plots come slowly. Where's Mr. Harry—upstairs or in the drawing-room with the ladies?"

"Neither, Mr. Barch, sir. Still sitting in the dining-room. Just on my way there with a message. Shall I say that you will rejoin him there, sir?"

"No, not at present, thanks. Just going upstairs to change my shoes—the grass is very damp. By the way, Hawkins, do you happen to know what time Mr. Harry got home last night? Your mistress was asking Miss Lorne earlier in the evening, and as he was with me until ten I shouldn't like to contradict anything he may have said, *you* know, should she conclude to ask *me*. Know when he got back?"

"No, sir, that I don't. All I can tell you is that he wasn't home at half-past twelve when I went to bed."

Cleek made a mental tally. Wasn't home at half-past twelve; and it was at half-past eleven, according to Mr. Narkom, that the limousine arrived at the head of Mulberry Lane and the first cry of murder was heard.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Don't worry him by mentioning that I asked. See him myself when I come down." Cleek then passed by and went up the stairs two steps at a time.

He did not stop at the second floor, however, but went up still another flight, and then, stopping a moment to look about to see if anybody was watching and to lean over the bannisters and listen if anybody was following, went fleetly to Harry Raynor's den, passed in, and shut the door behind him.

The place was quite black, but a touch of the electric button flooded it with light, and showed him at

once what he had come to seek. On a chair close to the open bedroom door lay the clothes which young Raynor had worn this afternoon, neatly folded, just as Hamer had placed them after brushing and pressing, in case the young man should, by any chance, elect to wear the same suit to-morrow.

Cleek moved rapidly to the chair, partly unfolded the coat and slipped his hand into the inside breast pocket. A letter was there—*the* letter, as he learned when he drew it out and opened it—typewritten by what was clearly the hand of a novice, and setting forth just such a message as young Raynor had stated.

"A bad move, Margot, and a little less carefully done than I should have thought *you* would have countenanced, knowing how clever and cunning you are," was his mental comment as he read the thing. Then carefully refolding it, he slipped it into his own pocket, snicked off the light, and left the room.

In the lower passage he encountered Hamer.

"Begging pardon, Mr. Barch," the footman said, "but I was just going up to see you, sir. Hawkins tells me that you were anxious to know at what hour Mr. Harry returned home last night, and it happens that I know."

"Do you?" said Cleek. "That's jolly. At what hour did he return last night, then?"

"He didn't return last night at all, sir. It was four this morning and day just beginning to break, sir, when I heard a noise, and getting up, looked out of my window, and there he was, a-coming up the

drive very cautious-like and acting as though he didn't want to be seen, as no doubt he didn't, sir, considering that master and mistress didn't know he was out at all."

"Didn't know he was out? How do you know that?"

"Because, sir, he said he was going to sit up and write letters when the master gave the order for Johnston to lock up after Lady Katharine and Miss Lorne returned from Clavering Close; and Mr. Harry he gave me a half a crown to see that the door wasn't bolted before I went to bed, as he intended to slip out and visit a friend. Of course I wouldn't have said anything about it to anybody, sir, if Hawkins hadn't told me that you said he was with you, which, of course, means that you were the friend he was going to see, and not, as I'd supposed, the Lady in Pink."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WHEN FOUR AND FOUR MAKE EIGHT

IN SPITE of himself Cleek's nerves gave an absolute jump, but being an adept in the art of dissimulation, he laughed lightly and gave Hamer a quizzical look.

"The Lady in Pink, eh?" he said cheerily. "You know more than your prayers, I'm afraid, Hamer. Now what in the world made you think he'd be calling on her last night, eh?"

"Well, sir, I can't exactly say what, unless it was a sort of putting two and two together, sir. I'd seen him with her over Kingston way on my day off, only she wasn't dressed in pink then, of course. And last night, a deal earlier in the evening, just about the time Lady Katharine and Miss Lorne was starting for Clavering Close it was, sir, I happens to go round back and slip into Mulberry Lane for a pull at my pipe on the sly—master never letting any of the servants smoke in the grounds, and housekeeper objecting to pipes in the servants' hall—and just as I comes out, there she was a-standing in the shadow of the trees, and so close up to the wall that I nigh barged into her, sir."

"Who? The Lady in Pink?"

"Yes, sir. Took her by surprise, coming out in that unexpected manner, and she just had time to throw a pink scarf she was wearing over her face and hurry away, sir, before I could so much as apologize. But quick as she was it didn't prevent me a-seeing of her, sir, and recognizing her as the lady I'd seen Mr. Harry with on my day off, although, as I say, sir, she was dressed quite different last night. Looked to me as she was going to some sort of an evening affair: a dance or the theatre or something of that sort; for she didn't have any hat on, and although she was wearing a long black cloak that reached almost to the ground, I could see when she made such a bolt to get out of sight that it was lined with ermine, and that, under it, she wore a rose-pink evening frock that she was holding up to keep from touching the ground."

Cleek did not so much as turn a hair, although beneath his placid exterior something in the nature of a tumult was raging. And why not? For here, undoubtedly, was the pink gauze dress that had left the fragment on the nail head at Gleer Cottage last night; and here, too, was a garment which, being turned inside out, would become in truth an ermine cloak!

"Oho! Now I see how you came by the idea that Mr. Harry had gone out to meet her, Hamer," he said with the utmost serenity. "Quite natural, quite, in the circumstances; only, as it turns out, you were mistaken. Mr. Harry spent the evening with me, and as we had the misfortune to miss the Pink Lady altogether, we didn't see her at all last night, worse

luck. But, I say, that's letting you into something, isn't it? Well, here's half a crown to pay you to forget all about it and to keep your tongue behind your teeth. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Much obliged, sir. Won't breathe a word to a living soul."

"Mind you don't, or you'll spoil sport and—wait! Stop a moment! Got time to do something for me?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir. Plenty of time; no end of it this evening. Master says he'll be up best part of the night reading, sir, and won't need me at all to-night; so if it's to go anywhere or to carry any message for you, sir, I've got hours at my disposal."

"Thanks, but I shan't require any more than a minute or two of your time. I'll just scrawl a line on the leaf of my notebook, and—oh, blow! Another fellow's evening clothes! And, besides, when I come to think, it was in the pocket of the coat that confounded thief carried off. Slip into the library and get me a sheet of paper and a bit of pencil, will you? Look sharp!"

"Couldn't do that, sir—couldn't get what you want from the library, I mean. Master's in there reading, sir, and he's locked the door and given orders that nobody's to disturb him. But if a bit of typewriting paper will do, sir——"

"Yes, certainly. The very thing. Can you get me a sheet or two?"

"As much as you care to have, sir. It's all in the hall cupboard along with the typewriter itself. Mas-

ter had them taken there when he'd finished his book and let the typist go. I'll get you some in an instant, sir."

He hurried away forthwith and was back presently with half a dozen sheets of typewriting paper, a bit of pencil and an envelope, which latter he had included on the off-chance of its being needed.

Walking a few paces away, Cleek rested the paper against the wall, scribbled a few hasty words, sealed them up in the envelope, and then handed it over to Hamer.

"Here, take this thing to Miss Lorne. You'll find her in the drawing-room," he said, as he threw the remaining sheets which he had employed as a sort of writing pad upon one of the hall chairs. "You can attend to that litter afterward. Move sharp!"

He turned as he spoke, as if to go upstairs again, but the very instant Hamer had disappeared he went fleetly back to the chair, caught up one of the sheets of paper, folded it carefully, slid it into his pocket, and passing swiftly and soundlessly down the hall, opened the door and went out again into the night.

Hitherto all had been speculation, theory, guesswork, not irrefutable facts; hitherto all clues had been mere possibilities, never actual certainties. Now——

The curious smile travelled up his cheek, slipped down again, and left his face as hard and as colourless as a mask of stone. He turned as he rounded

the angle of the house and glanced back to where the windows of the dining-room cut two luminous rectangles in the fragrant, flower-scented darkness; then his eye travelled farther on, and dwelt a moment on the chinks of light that arrowed out from the curtained bay of the library.

"Poor old chap! Poor, dear old chap!" he said between shut teeth.

The tightly woven fabric of last night's mystery had started to unravel. In one little corner a flaw had suddenly sprung into existence, and to-night the first loosened thread was in this man's hands.

He set his back to the lighted windows and forged on through the darkness until the swerving path brought him to the little summerhouse where, earlier, he had first met Ailsa, and stepping in, threw himself into a rustic seat and bent forward with his elbows upon his knees and his face between his hands: a grim and silent figure in the loneliness and the darkness.

Five minutes passed—six, seven—and found him still sitting there, still communing with his own thoughts, though it was now nearing ten o'clock, and he had told Dollops to be at the wall angle to meet him at nine. But suddenly his attitude changed; his hands dropped, his head jerked upward, as a sleeping cat's does when it hears a gnawing mouse, and he was on his feet, alert, eager, all alive, in a twinkling. Half a minute later Miss Lorne stepped from the grass on to the gravel and found him waiting for her in the arch of the summer-house doorway.

"It is you at last, then, is it?" he said, reaching out to her through the darkness. "Take my hand and I will guide you if you cannot see the way clearly. I can't risk striking a match."

"It isn't necessary; I know the way quite well," she answered; but she took his hand all the same. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting; I came as quickly as I could. Mrs. Raynor had fallen asleep over her novel while we were waiting for you and her son to finish your cigars and join us in the drawing-room, but Hamer coming in with your note awoke her and I could not get away so quickly as I desired."

"Was Mrs. Raynor interested in the note, then? Did she show any desire to hear what it was about?" he questioned eagerly.

"Oh, no. She"—colouring under cover of the darkness—"she merely laughed, and said that it was no more than she should have expected, but she kept me talking so long that I nearly lost all patience, and your note did puzzle me, Mr. Cleek. Why was it so important that you should see me at once without Kathie knowing? Have you discovered anything fresh?"

"Such strange things indeed have happened, Miss Lorne, since this evening," he returned quietly, "that I think I shall need your help in getting to the bottom of them. For one thing, it is now absolutely certain that the murderer of the Common keeper came into these grounds last night after he had committed the crime, and that when he gave Narkom and

his men the slip the fellow came directly to this place unseen."

"Mr. Cleek!"

"Sh-h-h! Not so loud, please. And don't shake like that. Steady yourself, for there is something yet more startling to come. There is now positive proof, Miss Lorne, that Lady Katharine Fordham did leave this house last night and go to Gleer Cottage."

"I won't believe it!" she flung out loyally. But she had scarcely more than said it when his next words cut the ground from beneath her.

"A witness has turned up," he said; "a witness who saw her there and spoke to her."

"A witness? Dear God! Who?"

"Geoffrey Clavering!"

"Geoffrey Clavering? Geoffrey?"

"Yes. He and Lady Katharine had an interview in the ruin this evening, an interview which I overheard without either being aware of my presence. That is what sent Lady Katharine to bed with a bad headache just before dinner. Geoffrey Clavering accused her of murdering De Louvisan and acknowledged that it was he himself who placed the two lighted candles at the feet of the dead man's body."

She made no cry this time, no single sound. He knew that she was beyond doing so, that she was struck to the very heart, and he made haste to lessen her distress by telling her of Lady Katharine's denial and of the whole circumstance as it happened. Then

he told of his own discovery of the buried clothing, his overhearing the interview, the manner in which the lovers had parted, and, finally, of his own act in apprehending young Clavering and then accepting his parole and sending him off to London for the night.

"Why did you do that?" she questioned feebly, and was not satisfied even when he explained his motive. "I will not even take his word against Kathie's, but I could have told you that he speaks the truth when he says that his stepmother's interest in him is so great it is very likely that she did go out on the Common to look for him, and for the reason he gave. If he were her own son she could not think more of him. She absolutely idolizes him. He is not dearer to his father than he is to her; and if he does not return to Clavering Close to-night, be sure she will have the Common searched from end to end, and will go half out of her mind when she does not find him."

Cleek took his chin between his thumb and forefinger and squeezed it hard. This was somewhat of a facer, he was obliged to confess.

"You rather take the wind out of my sails," he said reflectively. "If the boy spoke the truth, if the stepmother really does care like that, why that eliminates her from the case altogether, and it isn't worth while asking you to take the risk I alluded to in the note."

"What risk?"

"A very considerable one for a young lady in your position, should you be seen. As I do not even know

Lady Clavering by sight, I was going to ask you if you would mind prowling about the Common in company with me, that, if the lady put in an appearance, you might be able to identify her for me. But of course, if it is so very certain that she will join in the search for the boy, there's no necessity for doing such a thing."

"Pardon me, but I think, Mr. Cleek, there is more reason than ever," she replied, "if only to ease her mind, you know. You might do that by telling her that Geoff was unexpectedly called to town and that you were on the way to the Close to tell them so. I don't in the least mind taking the risk, as you call it, under those circumstances; it would be a charity to do so, for I know her ladyship, and Sir Philip will worry. Of course they will not think of worrying yet a while; it is much too early; and as Geoff came over here to see Kathie they will think he is remaining for the evening. But later, when it is past bedtime, when it is getting on toward twelve o'clock, they will be half out of their minds with anxiety. Oh, yes; I'll go with you willingly, this minute if you like, in such a cause as that."

"How loyal you are! What a woman you are! What a friend!" said Cleek admiringly. "Shall I tell you something? I have hope that one of those friends will be wholly cleared before another day comes; that something may happen to-night which will make Geoff Clavering the happiest of men and you and Lady Katharine almost beside yourselves

with joy. No, don't ask me what it is just yet a while. I have dreams and fancies and odd notions like other men sometimes; and I am a great believer in the theory of Loisette that a likeness of events acting upon a weary brain is apt to produce similar results in certain highly strung natures. But will you walk with me as far as the angle of the wall on the other side of the shrubbery, Miss Lorne? Dollops is waiting there for me. I have something of great importance for him to do to-night, and I think you will be interested in it. Will you come? Thank you! This way then, please, as quietly as you can."

Taking her hand and keeping always on the grass and always in the dark, where the shadows of the trees lay between them and the lighted windows of the Grange, he led her on to something which even he had not foreseen and never for a moment guessed.

At the angle of the wall he stopped and began to whistle softly "Kathleen Mavourneen." As upon another occasion, before he had completed the third bar, the wall door gaped open and flashed shut again and Dollops was in the dark, tree-crowded enclosure with him. It was a rather more excited Dollops than he had expected to find, however, for Cleek had no more than just begun to apologize for his lateness when the boy was on him like a pouncing cat and was cutting into his low-spoken words in a panting sort of whisper:

"For Gawd's sake, gov'ner. Come quick, sir!" he said, as he laid a tense, nervous grip on Cleek's

arm. "'Nother door in the wall, sir. Higher up where them mulberry trees is thickest. Woman prowlin' round, gov'ner. Been prowlin' round this ten minutes past and been to that door and tried it three times a'ready. Woman in a pink dress, sir, and a long dark cloak reachin' almost to the ground!"

"Margot!" said Cleek in an exultant whisper. "Margot at last, by George!"

Then, for the second time that night, he received a shock.

"If you mean that French Aparsh 'skirt' we run up against in the time of the Red Crawl, gov'ner," interposed Dollops, "you're backin' the wrong horse. It aren't *her*—aren't a bit like her, sir; no fear!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE LADY AT THE GATE

CLEEK was conscious of a sense of keen disappointment at this piece of intelligence, it so completely upset all his calculation. Hitherto, the bits of the puzzle had fitted nicely and bade fair to make a smooth and flawless whole.

"Are you sure?" he whispered, laying a tense hand upon Dollops's arm. "Don't jump to a conclusion without positive evidence. Are you *sure?*"

"Rath-*er!* Of course it's too dark to see her face, gov'ner; but when she come to the gate the first time—she's been several, sir—it was a deal lighter on account of the moon not bein' hid so much with them blessed clouds, sir; and I could see then that she was wot you might call a high-stepper—summink classy and up in the nines, gov'ner, and had a way with her that you don't pick up if you aren't born to it. She couldn't have been putting it on for effect, 'cause she didn't know there was anybody there to see. Gone she is now, sir; slipped off over the Common, and I lost sight of her among all them furze bushes, but she'll come back, never fear. She's went away like that two or three times before, but always come back and tried the door, and jist struck her hands

together and rocked back and forwards like she was half beside herself when she found it locked and nobody there to meet her."

"And you didn't succeed in seeing her face at all?"

"No, sir. It never was light enough for me to do that. But even if it had been, it wouldn't 'a' been no use, sir. She had summick that looked like a white lace scarf wrapped all round her head and over her face. But I was near enough to make out as she smelt summink beautiful of voylits, and had on one of them shiny, silky-lookin' kind of mackintoshes and a dress of pink silk."

A black mackintosh and a dress of pink silk! *Not* a black cloak lined with ermine! Not a dress of pink gauze! Of course Dollops was right in his statement that it was not Margot; that fact alone proved it. So there was a second woman who prowled about Wuthering Grange and endeavoured to see somebody in secret, was there? Whom? Harry Raynor or Lord St. Ulmer?

Clearly the one in the pink gauze—Margot beyond all possible question—came to see Raynor, for Hamer had identified her as the woman he had seen in that young man's company that day at Kingston. Who, then, was this other woman in pink? And whom did *she* come to see? What was *her* mission, her place in this elusive puzzle?

Come to think of it, he had been a fool to imagine when Dollops first spoke of her that it could possibly be Margot. The pink dress itself ought to have told

him that. For although young Raynor had said that the lady he knew as Mademoiselle Mignon de Varville nearly always dressed in pink, Margot was no such fool as to prowl round this place to-night in the identical frock she had worn at the time of the tragedy, and from which that tiny scrap had been torn by the nail head in the floor of Gleer Cottage.

True, nobody but Narkom and Ailsa and he himself knew, as yet, of the finding of that betraying scrap, but—— Ah, well, you couldn't catch Margot napping! She might not know when, how, nor *where* that scrap had been torn off, but *her* shrewd eyes would detect the missing bit in the skirt: she would be on to it like a cat on a mouse. He knew her methods, knew her miscroscopic carefulness and attention to detail. What, then, was this other woman's place in the puzzle? What was she after? Whom had she come to see? He'd make it his business to find that out, and in short order, too.

These things had travelled through Cleek's thoughts rapidly. It was scarcely more than a moment after Dollops had last spoken when he addressed the boy again.

"I've got something important on hand for you, as I told you, my lad," he said in a cautious whisper. "But, first, tell me: where is this other door in the wall of which you speak, the one where the Pink Woman goes?"

"Jist about thirty feet farther up, gov'ner; there where them mulberry trees is so blessed thick. You

don't notice the place till you come smack on to it, on account of furze bushes and ivy along the foot of the wall. You can creep up till you're almost on it, though, without a body seein' of you, 'specially if you go before the party comes back."

"Right you are," said Cleek in reply. "I'll act on that tip, my lad. Now, then, listen here. There's a ruin in the grounds of this place, and that ruin I particularly wish to have closely watched to-night. For one thing, the man who murdered the Common keeper made his way to that place and buried his victim's clothing there; and for another—oh, well, never mind. That will keep for later. Miss Lorne" —he turned to Ailsa, who all along had remained silent and closely huddled back in the shadow of the wall-angle and the trees—"Miss Lorne, we shall have to defer our stroll on the Common until later, I'm afraid. I shall have to look into the matter of this mysterious woman in pink before we can give any further thought to Lady Clavering and her possible anxiety over her stepson. In the meantime, will you, as silently and as expeditiously as you can, steal back through the grounds and show Dollops the way to the ruin? Afterward, you and I can meet again here. And you, Dollops, listen closely to what I say. The chances are that some one, either man or woman, will secretly visit that ruin to-night. Keep yourself well hidden and your eyes wide open. If a woman comes, slip away from the place as quietly as you can, come round to the shrubbery near the front entrance to the

house, and hoot like an owl three times in succession; then lie low until I come out and join you. But if, on the other hand, it should be a man who puts in an appearance—here, lay hold of this pair of handcuffs—look sharp! At all costs, at any hazard, get those things on him and then blow your police whistle as a signal to me. I'll be with you like a shot. Now, then, cut along with you. Show him the way, Miss Lorne, and be as quiet as you can in your movements, both of you."

"Mice'll be fools to us, sir," whispered Dollops.

Cleek waited a minute to let them get well on their way, then stooped in the darkness, crept to the wall door, opened it cautiously, and went down on all-fours upon the strip of grass and the row of furze bushes that flanked that wall upon the outer side and made a narrow black alley between it and the crowded mulberry trees.

The moon had ridden farther than ever into the depths of the thick, slow-moving clouds, and the darkness was almost opaque. To the left the great Common stretched out, a thing of gloom and shadows, blotted here and there with deeper black where the furze clumps were thickest or the full-leaved tree reached up above the skyline. On the right, the blank wall rose, flat, smooth as your hand, so tall it shut out even the lights in the windows of the Grange; and between these lay Mulberry Lane, a black funnel leading on to deeper darkness and the shapelessness of crowded trees.

In the shadows of that narrow alley made by the wall and the furze bushes Cleek crouched a moment and listened before he ventured to move another inch. Not a sound, not the merest ghost of a sound. If the woman were in the immediate neighbourhood, she was keeping extremely quiet; therefore it behoved him to progress with infinite caution. Inch by inch, on hands and knees, he moved up that narrow alley, stopping every now and then to prick up his ears and listen breathlessly. But upon every occasion he found the stillness yet unbroken and no sign or sound of breathing life anywhere about him.

Two minutes passed—three—five—half a dozen, and still all was as it had been in the beginning. By this time this slow, cautious creeping had carried him over two thirds of the distance, and he was now within ten or eleven feet of the hidden gate; and still no sound or sign of the woman's return. Indeed, no sound of any sort until, with one hand outstretched and one knee lifted to edge forward yet a trifle more, he paused abruptly, sucked in his breath, and huddled softly down, becoming but a mere dark heap on the damp, dark grass.

A sound had come at last! The unmistakable sound of some one moving cautiously through close-pressing branches and crowded leaves.

It was so faint a thing that ears less keen than his might not have detected it. Yet, at the first rustle of the first stirred leaf he caught the hiss of it and knew it was not the woman that made it; for the

prickly foliage of furze makes no rustling sound when a passing body brushes it, and there was nothing upon the outer side of the wall *but* furze that was low enough to be brushed in passing.

Clearly, then, the sound was from the other side of the wall, from within the grounds of the Grange! Some one was coming to keep the tryst—some one who, evidently, had been delayed past an agreed time, otherwise the woman would not have made all those anxious pilgrimages to the door and been so upset when she found it still locked and nobody there to meet her.

Well, this was a stroke of good fortune at all events; for if by any chance the woman did not return there would at least be the satisfaction of discovering—— A sound interrupted: a cat's mew to the life. And from the shadow of a thick furze hedge on the Common side of the lane it was answered.

"Yes, I am here," a shrill, eager voice called out in a sharp, keen whisper. "Oh, come quickly or I shall go insane!"

Almost instantly there was a rustle of silken garments, a patter of footsteps, the swift moving of a figure across the lonely lane, followed by the rattle and click of a key in a spring lock, the creak of an inswung gate moving upon its hinges, and with these things the sound of an excited man whispering warningly, "Sh-h-h!" as the woman swept down upon him in a state bordering on absolute hysteria.

"Oh, if you could but know what agonies I have

suffered, what horrors of suspense I have endured!" she said in a wailing sort of whisper. "I feared that you might not be able to come, after I have risked so much to be here; but when I heard the cat's mew, I wonder that I did not scream."

And again the man's whispered "Sh-h-h!" sounded, but fuller than ever of excitement and fear.

But Cleek scarcely heard it. Other and more startling things were claiming his thoughts. A scent of violets was in his nostrils; a sting of bitter recollection was in his memory. What was it the dying Common keeper had said? "All shiny pale green satin, sir, with sparklin' things on her bosom, and smellin' like a field of voylits in the month of May!"

He did not need Ailsa Lorne to point her out to him after this. He knew without anybody telling him; knew in that first moment, as surely as he ever lived to know in moments yet to come, that this veiled and night-hidden woman who stood there by the garden door keeping tryst with a man was she who had been out on the Common last night: Sir Philip Clavering's wife!

And the man she was meeting, this crafty fellow who hung back in the shadow of the solid gate, who and what was he? What part was his in this grim riddle of death?

It was Lady Clavering herself who gave the answer.

"Oh, it is so easy to say that," she went on, answering his warning "Sh-h-h" in a whisper that was shrill with agony and despair, "but the dread of shrieking

will be on me forever after this, the horrible dread that if I do not cry out in my waking moments I may unconsciously do so in my sleeping ones. I know it was mad of me to do this thing, to take this dreadful risk in coming here; but I couldn't sleep until I saw you, until I had told you that I know! I think I knew it yesterday; I think I foresaw it when you wrote and warned me, and if I had not been a coward, if fate had not sent him to Clavering Close last night and let me see that it was written he should come back into my life again——"

Her voice snapped off and failed her for an instant, sinking down to a dull, whimpering sound like the wail of an animal that is beaten; then it came back to her and she spoke again.

"I knew you would kill him, I knew that you would!" she said in that horrible, excited whisper. "I felt it in my soul the moment he looked up and recognized me, and I knew what I—what you—had to dread. It was that that drove me out on the Common. I wanted to find you; I wanted to stop you. But it was too late, too late! I know that you did it for my sake as much as for your own, but the thought of the thing, the *thought* of it! If anything can palliate that, if God can in any way excuse it, it will be that you got the letters; that you tore them up, burnt them, did anything in the world but let them fall into that woman Margot's hands! Oh, did you? I cannot sleep until I know. For if you did not——"

Here her voice snapped again, but for quite another reason this time, a reason which made Cleek groan inwardly.

Far down at the other end of the dark alley where he lay breathlessly listening, a faint rustling sound had suddenly risen—the sound of some one creeping gently toward him. He knew and understood what was happening, what an unkindly blow fate had dealt him. Ailsa was returning. She had taken his expression, "Afterward you and I can meet here again," to mean after she had conducted Dollops to the ruin, not after Cleek's own work was done; and lo! here she was returning at this inopportune moment. She was creeping along on tiptoe, it was true, and moving as stealthily and as silently as she knew how, but in that utter stillness, with silk skirts that brushed the wall as she advanced——

The end came abruptly. There was just one second of breathless listening, then without a word the two people at the open doorway parted. Lady Clavering jumped back, darted across the lane, and vanished in the blackness of the Common; the wall door closed, the spring lock clicked, and the sound of a man's running echoed faintly from the other side. No time this for craft and finesse. Here was a call for action, a demand for muscle, not brain. If that man was a member of this household, if fleet running could do it, if any man who should be under that roof was *not* there——

Cleek was on his feet like a flash. He scudded

down the lane openly, he ducked into the door and vanished into the gardens without so much as a word to Ailsa, he struck through the plantation and made a short cut for the lawn and the front door, and with jaw squared and teeth shut, ran and ran and ran.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE MOUSETRAP

CLEEK covered the distance between the wall angle and the door of the Grange in a fraction over a minute, and he had neither heard any one nor seen any one on the way. He went up the steps two at a time, and, swinging into the hallway, made hot foot for the dining-room. An inward push on the door and all that lay beyond it was in view.

The lights were still burning, the decanter and the glasses still *en évidence*, and, what was still more to the point, there lay Mr. Harry Raynor with his arms sprawled out over the tablecloth and his head between them, snoring away in a semi-drunken stupor, with his mouth wide open and his flushed face a little less attractive in slumber than it was in wakefulness.

Not he, then!

Cleek dashed out of the room and flew upstairs to Lord St. Ulmer's room. No time for craft and cunning this. At whatever risk, at whatever cost, he must assure himself of where *that* man was at this particular moment; and, even if he had to break down the door to get in—— The possibility ceased to exist while it was yet taking shape in his mind.

For he had reached the second landing, had come within three feet of Lord St. Ulmer's room, when he heard a voice from within it say, "Then if there is nothing more, your lordship, allow me to thank your lordship and to say good-night"—and was in time to see the door open and Johnston, the butler, come out. More than that, to look past him and see the figure of a man lying in bed with his back to the door, his face to the wall, and one pajama-clad arm lying outside the bedclothing.

Not St. Ulmer either, eh? Then who the dickens—— He turned and made a bolt for the staircase again.

"Anything I can get you, Mr. Barch?" inquired Johnston. "I've just returned from town, sir, so if there's anything Hamer has neglected to do in my absence——"

"No, thanks, don't want anything!" flung back Cleek, not waiting for him to finish; and then cut downstairs again in such hot haste that his feet beat an audible tattoo upon the padded steps and gave such evidence of excitement that he was not at all surprised when the key of the library click-clacked sharply, the door opened, and General Raynor appeared.

"What's this? What's the meaning of all this confounded hubbub when I expressly said"—he began—and then, looking up and seeing Cleek, stopped short and changed his tone. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Barch; I didn't know it was you! Is there anything wrong?"

"No, General," replied Cleek. "Sorry if I disturbed you. Just looking for——" Then he, too, stopped short and changed his tone. For of a sudden his ear had caught the shrilling note of a distant police whistle, and excitement swayed him.

"Dollops, by Jupiter!" he cried unthinkingly. "Got him! Got him, the little brick!" and without another word he faced about, ran down the hall, and pelted off through the grounds in the direction of the ruin.

And all the time the police whistle was shrilling, and Dollops's voice was sounding, and the darkness was full of scuffling sounds. For the noise of the whistle had disturbed the servants, and Cleek was hard put to it to get to the scene of the uproar before them. He did, however; but they were close upon his heels and as excited as he when, upon nearing the ruin, they came upon two struggling figures linked together and careering about like a couple of fighting tomcats.

"Here yer are, gov'ner; ketched him foul, the rotter," sang out Dollops as his master came scudding up with all that troop of servants pounding along in his wake. "Look! See!"

Then an electric torch clicked, and lo, there he was, with one end of a pair of handcuffs snapped on his own wrist and the other locked fast upon that of a distinguished-looking man in a spring overcoat and evening clothes.

A stranger to Cleek this man, but not to the ser-

vants of Wuthering Grange; and it came as a shock when he heard them speak his name.

It was Sir Philip Clavering.

The man's identity had no sooner been made known than he broke forth with a storm of indignant protest.

"What is the meaning of this outrage, and who is this young person?" he demanded with heat. "As some of you have good enough eyes to recognize me, perhaps you will have good enough wits to go for your master and let me get to the bottom of this extraordinary proceeding as soon as possible. I should like to know what on earth this means. Ah, Raynor, is that you?" he added, as he caught sight of the General forcing his way to the front. "Glad you've put in an appearance. Perhaps you can throw some light upon this affair. Who's this fellow?" twitching his head toward Dollops. "What's he doing here? And what is the meaning of this astonishing business, if you please?"

"Good heavens above, how do you expect I am going to know? Never saw him in all my life," exclaimed the General in bewilderment. "Look here, young man, what's the meaning of this? Who are you? What are you doing in this place? Speak up."

"Name's Dollops," replied that youth serenely. "Business: Scotland Yard. Lay: Doin' wot I'm told by my gov'ner. Boss: Mr. 'Amilton Cleek, *Es*-quire. All other questions I refers to him."

Cleek! The name produced universal excitement. There was not one person present that had not, at one time or another, heard it and did not recollect of what it was the synonym. It stood for the Law and the coming of the Law! And last night a man had been done to death within a gunshot of this house.

"It is too absurd, too absurd!" said Sir Philip, after a moment, speaking with a little shaky laugh and looking Dollops up and down with half-contemptuous interest. "I hope, Raynor, that you—— Good heavens above! What asinine mistakes the law does sometimes make. And it is all so easily explained. Superintendent Narkom of the Yard will speak for me if it is necessary. There can, by no shadow of possibility, be anything to connect me with that abominable case."

It was here that Cleek chose to take part in the affair, and with a warning glance at Ailsa, who had come up and joined the gathering, stepped forward and addressed Sir Philip.

"My dear Sir Philip Clavering, allow me to introduce myself," he said suavely, serene in the confidence that Dollops, hearing, would take the cue and act accordingly. "My name is Barch; I am at present a guest of the General's, and I am taking this liberty because I, too, happen to be a friend of Mr. Narkom's. I have heard him speak of you time and again, and always with the warmest interest. Perhaps, then, if we question this young man——" He

turned to Dollops, and Dollops looked at him and never turned a hair! "Boy, what's all this thing about? How came you in this place, and for what reason?"

"Come in by the garden door, sir, 'arf an hour or so back. Told off by my gov'ner to lie low and wait for somebody who might come a-sneakin' about, meanin' to break into the house, I suppose, and with his eye on the plate."

"I see! Well, better take my advice, my lad, and unlock those handcuffs, and set this gentleman at liberty before they do come, or you're likely to have a sharp talking to from Superintendent Narkom. By the way, what induced you to snap them on him in the first place? You surely do not expect us to believe that a gentleman of Sir Philip Clavering's standing was acting suspiciously? What was he doing, if you please, that you should have gone to such a length?"

"Sneakin' along and feelin' about the bushes like he was huntin' for somethin'," said Dollops as he unlocked the handcuffs and put them in his pocket.

"He is quite right in that, Mr. Barch. I *was* looking for something," said Sir Philip, wiping his wrists with his handkerchief, as though to remove something of the infection with which he felt he had come into contact. "As a matter of fact, I was looking for my way. I had come into the grounds from a point where I had never before entered them, and I was endeavouring to find a path which would lead me

to the house. As it was as black as a pocket, nothing was left me but *to* feel my way. I got hopelessly muddled up, and was just telling myself that I would have done better to make my call in orthodox fashion and by the regular entrance, when, the first thing I knew, this enterprising young man jumped out of the dark and pounced on me like a monkey. You see, it was this way, Raynor," glancing up at the General, who was looking at him fixedly, and with a curious ridge between his brows, as if, for some reason, he only half believed him, though for years they had been tried and trusted friends; "I was in such a dickens of a hurry to see you that when I came off the Common and found that wall door open——"

"Open? What wall door open?" interposed the General agitatedly.

"The one at the angle of the wall, where your boundary flanks the waste land between here and the right-of-way across the fields."

"And you found that door open? *Open?* Why, man alive, it has been locked and screwed up for years."

"Has it, indeed? Well, it was open to-night, then. As I was saying, when I found that open, I thought that, possibly, it might be a short cut to the house, so I dashed in and got into this abominable fix."

"But why did you wish to take a short cut to the house, Clavering? Was there any reason for such a thing?"

"None but that I was anxious; that I am anxious

still, when it comes to that. About my boy, Geoff, you know."

"About Geoff?"

"Yes, you know how foolish Marise and I are over him. He left to come over here early this afternoon, and said he would not be long, but he did not return even for dinner. Of course Marise was disappointed, for she had said that after so much gloom and depression we must do all that we could to brighten him up and to appear merry, and even went to the length of getting out a pink silk frock which he had always admired, when she dressed for dinner to-night. She was distressed when he didn't come, and anxiety brought on a splitting headache, so bad, in fact, that she went to her room to lie down and rest. Later, Celine came down to tell me she had taken a sleeping draught and there was every likelihood of her sleeping until morning. I was glad when I heard that, for I knew how she would worry if she were awake and the boy did not return at a reasonable hour; and when it crept along to be nine o'clock and after, I don't mind confessing that I began, myself, to worry."

"Why?" said Cleek, dropping in an unexpected query.

"My dear Mr. Barch, you wouldn't ask that if you knew what a bond of affection exists between my son and me," Sir Philip replied. And Cleek heard, or fancied that he heard, the General give a sort of sigh, as if he were contrasting this man's heir with his own. "Besides, after that mysterious and abominable affair

last night—after a man had been murdered in this identical neighbourhood, to have my boy out and alone—— Oh, well, you can understand. I got a bit nervous—a bit dotty, if you like. I imagined all sorts of things, and when it got to be half-past nine I set out to walk across the Common to meet him. I didn't, however, so I suppose he is still here; and in the enjoyment of Lady Katharine's society and the hope that has so unexpectedly returned to them both, has forgotten all about the time and the probable worrying of his silly old dad. That's why I was so anxious to get to the house as quickly as possible, Raynor, and why I was foolish enough to take what I fancied might be a short cut. I wanted to be certain that the boy is still here; I wanted to walk back with him when he goes home. No harm can possibly come to him then."

Not once during all this had General Raynor's eyes left the man's face, nor had the faint pallor and the curiously tense look departed from his own. He stood looking at Sir Philip in intense and unbroken silence, his lips tightly set, a worried look in his fixed eyes, as if he were trying to believe this thing and found it difficult to do so. Now, however, he turned to the assembled servants, ordered them back to the house, made one or two uneasy turns up and down for a distance of three or four yards, then halted suddenly and looked into Sir Philip's face again.

"Clavering," he said in his abrupt, direct manner, going straight to the point, as was his custom.

"Clavering, are you sure that you are telling the truth about this? Are you sure? Will you swear, will you give me your word of honour, that it was to seek your boy, that and that alone, which brought you to this place to-night?"

"Raynor! By the Lord Harry, sir——"

"No, don't fly into a passion. Anger is no answer, and an answer is what I want. A man of honour responds promptly to an appeal to that honour; and I am asking you on yours if you are telling the truth?"

"On my word of honour, then, I am!" said Sir Philip indignantly.

"And you will swear by it that you came only to meet your son? That you had no other purpose in coming whatsoever?"

"Yes, decidedly I will swear it. Are you taking leave of your senses, Raynor? What other reason *could* I have?"

An expression of intense relief drove that other and darker look from the General's face and eyes.

"I don't know," he said, fetching a deep sigh; "but I am glad to have your word for it, glad to say that I accept it. Still, why should I not ask? Why should I not question everything, any statement, in the face of to-night?"

"I don't know what you are driving at, I am sure."

"Don't you? Then let me tell you: your boy is not here. He left this afternoon; came and stayed but a little time, and left so early that there has been time and to spare for him to get back to Clavering

Close a dozen times over. On the top of that, you tell me that a door in my garden wall, a door that has been locked up, and screwed up, and even rusted up, for years was found standing open. And on top of that again, an emissary of the police, of Scotland Yard, of that man Cleek, is here in these grounds. Who opened that door? What brings the police to Wuthering Grange? That is what mystifies me; that is what I want to know. What brings the police here, of all places in England? Do you know, Clavering? Do you know, Miss Lorne? Do you know, Mr. Barch?"

"Not the ghost of an idea, I assure you, General," said Cleek serenely. "Never knew the beggars were here until this young person declared himself. But, yes, by Jove! We'll have 'em here in full force presently, I'm afraid, if those sounds go for anything. Coming in answer to that blessed whistle, I'll lay my life. Here, boy!"—this to Dollops—"nip off as quickly as you can, and head them off. Tell 'em it's a mistake; tell 'em you didn't mean to blow that whistle for assistance. Move sharp; we don't want that lot in here, or—— Hullo! I say, what's the matter, Sir Philip? A bad turn, is it? Upon my soul, you look as white as a sheet!"

It was no exaggeration. The moon, coming suddenly out from behind the clouds at that moment, showed him leaning heavily against a tree and looking pale as a dead man.

CHAPTER TWENTY–FIVE

THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT

"MY BOY?" Sir Philip Clavering made answer, in a wrung voice, a voice that clearly showed where all his thoughts were, and that he had had ears for nothing, care for nothing, heart for nothing, from the moment he had been told that Geoff had left the Grange hours and hours ago. "What has become of my boy? Where did he go? What has happened to him? He never came back! He never came back!"

The agony of the man was so intense, so apparent, that Cleek's heart ached for him, and he made haste to spare him any greater pain.

"Oh, as for that, Sir Philip, you needn't worry an atom," he said. "I think Miss Lorne has something to tell you about him, and just where he went, and why he hasn't returned. In fact, I know she has, for he left a message with her. Went to town on some special matter for Lady Katharine Fordham, didn't he, and is likely to be very late indeed in returning?"

"Yes," said Ailsa, taking her cue and remembering. "In fact, it is a matter that may keep him so late it is possible he will stop in town until morning,

Sir Philip. He asked me to send word over to you and Lady Clavering to relieve you of any possible anxiety; and, indeed, I should have done so long ago, only——"

"Only that I volunteered to walk over the Common and back with her if she'd carry the message herself instead of sending it by some one," supplemented Cleek, coming to the rescue. "And then, like an idiot, I sat so long after dinner with young Mr. Raynor that I forgot all about it until she sent me in word. We were going to start at once, and would have done so but for this hubbub. Happened to think, however, that as it was late and the Common very lonely, it would be wisest to carry something for protection in case of necessity, so ran up to my room to get a pistol I had given me. That's why you heard me making such a clatter in running up and down stairs, General, when you popped out of the library and asked what was up."

The General made no reply, but the expression of his mouth and eyes told plainly what he thought of a man who had to rely upon firearms for protection in case of assault by footpads. He gave his shoulders a significant twitch.

But Sir Philip was too greatly relieved by the good news of his son's safety to give thought to other details.

"You can't think what a load you've taken off my mind, Mr. Barch," he said. "I can go home now feeling satisfied. My mind is at rest."

"I wish mine were, then," put in the General. "But to have one's place invaded—and secretly invaded—by the police! God! If I only knew what it means. That thing last night, and now this! Who under this roof has fallen under suspicion—*could* fall under suspicion? The thing is as mysterious as it is appalling. Clavering, you know this man Narkom. You must introduce him to me; he must tell me upon what evidence, what pretext, this thing has been done. The police do not take action without *some* shadow of reason, some good cause, for what they do; and that my garden door should be secretly unfastened that one of their spies may enter these grounds—— It is abominable. Why didn't he apply to me for permission to enter the place if he thought it necessary to do so? I have my rights as well as any other subject of the king. Why, then, should he break open my garden door without warrant or privilege and send his spies in here?"

"Maybe he didn't, General." It was Cleek that spoke. "Come to think of it, the explanation of that chap who claimed to be attached to the police was rather fishy, and he was precious sharp about cutting his lucky when I sent him off. Besides, why *should* he take orders from *me*, anyway?"

"My dear Mr. Barch——"

"Catch the point? We've had one sneak thief visit the Grange already, General. What's the odds that they are not identical? We never knew how the first one managed to get into the place nor where

he went when he got out of it. Well, then, what about that garden door being the answer? Why shouldn't it have been he that unfastened it? Why shouldn't this business of pouncing upon Sir Philip and making an outcry be a clever dodge to make a safe getaway?"

The General looked up, brightening, as if a load had been lifted from his shoulders, and breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"I hadn't thought of that, Mr. Barch," he said, caught by the feasibility of an argument backed up so plausibly. "We did have a thief pay us a visit earlier in the evening, to be sure; and, as you say, very possibly—— Yes, yes, it must be so. There could be no shadow of a reason for the police coming here, because—— Eh? What's that, Hamer?" facing round as he heard his name mentioned, and discovering the second footman, who had just put in an appearance. "Telephone, did you say?"

"Yessir. Somebody asking to speak to Mr. Barch, sir; and I requested him to hold the line while I came to call the gentleman."

"Somebody calling for me over the telephone?" inquired Cleek, with sudden deep interest. "You are sure it is for me, Hamer? Sure that the name was Barch?"

"Yessir, quite. Mr. Philip Barch was the name given, and I was to say that it's a most important message."

Cleek turned and looked inquiringly at the General.

"Yes, certainly, Mr. Barch, certainly," he said, replying to that look. "The instrument is in the library, which opens directly off my study. Hamer will show you the way."

"No, I will," put in Ailsa. "I shall have to be running up to see how Kathie is, and it will be on my way. Good-night, Sir Philip. Good-night, General. Come, Mr. Barch, I'll show you the way." She went with him out of the moonlight in the open to the dark of the shrubbery and the trees that shut in the path to the house.

"Tell me," she whispered eagerly as they hurried along. "Are you nearer the end? Is the solution anywhere in sight?"

"I think so," he answered.

"Oh!" with a sharp intaking of the breath. "You found it out at the garden door, then? You saw the woman and you saw the person she came to meet?"

"To the contrary, I saw neither. I merely heard the woman speak. It was a voice I had never heard before. The man said nothing, and never once showed himself. He might have done both but that they heard you returning and separated like a shot. But please, we will not speak of that at present. Wait for me by the shrubbery; I'll tell you a lot when I meet you there. Just now I am anxious to know who it is that is telephoning to 'Mr. Philip Barch' and for what. Only two persons outside of Dollops and yourself know that name and whose

identity it covers. One is Geoffrey Clavering, the other Mr. Narkom. No, please! Don't ask me any questions now, I can't stop to answer them. But this you may know if it will ease your mind at all: Lady Katharine Fordham never had anything to do with it, although she was there. Oh, yes, she was, Miss Lorne; for all your protestations, I tell you that she was! And, what is more, I know the man, although I do not as yet know the motive!"

"Oh! You found it out, then, at the garden door?"

"No, I did not. I daren't stop to explain, but believe me, Miss Lorne, I begin to see light. I only wonder at one thing: What makes Sir Philip Clavering use black cosmetic? Sheer vanity, I suppose."

"Does he?" cried Ailsa, in surprise.

"Yes, on his moustache. It's wonderful why some of these old men hate gray moustaches so. Wait for me, I'll be back as quickly as possible," and he dived into the house to answer the mysterious telephone call.

Cleek went straight to the library, flashed an inquiring look all round it as he closed the door, made sure that nobody else was there, and walking to the telephone took up the receiver and put it to his ear.

"Hallo!" he said somewhat cautiously; then, after a moment: "Yes, Barch," he added in response to a query from the other end. "What's that? Speak a little louder, please; I can't hear clearly. And, I say, I don't recognize your voice. Who are you?"

The voice in question underwent a complete change, showing that the owner of it had, in the first instance, carefully altered it until sure of his man, and then over the wire came promptly the two words: "Geoff Clavering!"

"Eh, what?" exclaimed Cleek, not a little surprised by this revelation, and not doubting the truth of the statement for an instant now that the real voice of the speaker sounded. "Why, what the dickens—I say, where are you?"

"In London, at the Savoy Hotel, speaking from one of the booths. Got here twenty minutes ago, and as soon as I registered and got a room, I hunted up one of the clerks who knew me by sight, and then came in here and rang you up."

"Why?"

"I wanted you to know that I'd kept faith with you; that I really have come to London as I promised. If you doubt it, there's the clerk to prove it any time you like."

"Why, you ripping young—— By George! Well, well! See here: as open confession's good for the soul, let me say that I don't doubt it, and, what's more, I never did doubt it, you splendid young pepper pot!"

"Thanks very much, that's jolly nice of you. But listen here, Mr.—er—Barch. Can't you get word to my pater somehow? He'll worry himself dotty when midnight comes on and I don't turn up. And I say: how long have I got to stop up here, anyhow?

I hear there's a down train at four in the morning. Can't I take that, and put on end to the dad's anxiety as soon as possible?"

"He hasn't any anxiety on the subject whatsoever, my boy. Miss Lorne and I have seen him, and trumped up a story to cover everything. He doesn't expect you back until morning. But—— Would you like a pleasant surprise? Well, you can come back at once if you like and get it. Take your own time, however; only be sure that you turn up here not later than twelve, and are waiting just outside the lodge gates of the Grange when I go there to meet you. What's that? Yes, quite satisfied, quite. She did come out on the Common to-night, and—— What's that? To look for you? Yes, of course. What other motive could she have, you silly fellow? She came out, and your father came out; and—listen and catch this, Clavering"—sinking his voice—"for it is very important. You said, did you not, that last night when Lady Katharine took you into that house she told you she would show you something that would 'light you back to the land of happiness'?"

"Yes. Those were her words. Why?"

"Well, you be outside the lodge gates at the time I want you, my boy, and I'll show both of you the way to that land to-night." And he hung up the receiver before Geoff could say a word.

"The soul of honour, just as I knew he was, the young beggar!" he said, putting his thoughts into

words for once in a way. "A son for any man to be proud of, that!" And chuckling a little, he prepared to leave the room.

But as if the sight of that room, with its swinging French window, its reading desk with an open book upon it and an easy chair beside, brought back to his memory that other son and that other father, the smile faded suddenly from his lips, his jaw squared, and a pucker gathered between his level brows.

What a difference between the two sons of those two men he had left out there in the grounds! The one clean-lived, clean-minded, honour's very self. The other a wastrel, a sot, a liar, the consort of evil women and disreputable men, a poor, paltry worm living in an oak tree's shade.

And to-night the General had wondered why the police should be coming to Wuthering Grange; what trail from last night's tragedy led to the threshold of this house! Yet, while he sat here reading, his own son—— Heigho! "'Tis a mad world, my masters," a mad, mad world indeed. Poor old chap! Poor, blind, unsuspecting old chap, sitting here all alone and reading! What was it he was reading while his unnatural son was slandering him to a stranger?

He walked to the reading desk and bent over the open book that lay upon it, with a pamphlet beside it and a litter of loose papers all round.

"Fruit Culture," by Adolph Bonnaise. And the pamphlet? He took it up to look at the title page, for the half of it was smothered under loose papers,

one or two of which his act sent fluttering to the floor. The April number of *The Gardener and Fruit Grower*. Reading of flowers and of fruits, of Nature's good and beautiful things, and all the while—— Yes, indeed, Shakespeare was right. It *is* a mad world! Worse than mad: it is wicked! And the sons of men are the wickedest things in it!

Oh, well, he mustn't stand wasting time here in moralizing and mooning. Ailsa was waiting.

The papers he had disturbed lay on the floor, close to a half-filled scrap basket. Unimportant things enough they were: seedsmen's circulars, soap advertisements, tailors' announcements, all the litter of loose-leaf insets that are thrust between the covers of monthly magazines; quite unimportant, and not worth the trouble he was taking to gather them up and replace them upon the desk. But—— Oh, well, he shouldn't like the General to think that when he came into the library to use his telephone he'd been cad enough to look over his papers; so, of course ——That all of them? Any drop into the waste basket by chance? Perhaps that bit of white paper with the red blob of sealing wax on each end might have fallen with the rest. He picked it out of the basket, turned it over, and decided that it hadn't; smelt it, smiled one of his curious one-sided smiles, and flung it back into the basket.

Even an old soldier may have his foibles and his weaknesses. It is on record that Bonaparte had a secret love of bonbons; that Washington had a pas-

sion for barley sugar; and that Drake slept always with anise seeds within easy reach.

He turned away as he tossed the paper back, walked to the door, opened it, and stepped out. The staircase down which he had run in such hot haste at the sound of Dollops's whistle was before him. He stopped an instant and looked up it, then nodded his head in the direction of Lord St. Ulmer's quarters, and if he had put his thoughts into actual words, would have said this:

"I'll know your part in it, and I'll see your face by hook or by crook before this night is over; I promise you that, my man!" Then he turned again, and went down the hall to the dining-room.

Harry Raynor was still there, lying with his arms sprawled out upon the table and his head sunk between them.

Cleek stood still and looked at him. Of a certainty, the man had moved since last he saw him; but whether that movement had been merely the unconscious stirring of a sleeping man or the fellow had been up and about in the meantime, it was impossible to say.

Cleek, taking no chances, closed and locked the door, and assuming once more his "Barch" tone and manner of expression, advanced to his side, shook him, and said:

"I say, Raynor, don't be a howling ass! Buck up and don't sleep the whole blessed night away. I'm jolly lonesome."

Young Raynor went on snoring serenely, and neither answered nor moved.

Still Cleek was taking no chances. He repeated the operation with greater force and louder spoken words, and finding it produced no effect, finally shook the man so hard that his head lolled over on one arm and let the hidden face come into sight.

The jaw hung loose, the scooped cheeks and pendulous lip gleamed pale as ivory, and the whites of his eyes shone like narrow bands of silver through the slits of their half-closed lids.

There was no question whatsoever regarding the man's condition. Satisfied now, Cleek felt his pulse, pushed up one of his eyelids and examined the eye itself. The pupil was largely dilated, the white suffused considerably, and both were slightly filmed.

"Hum-m-m!" he breathed conclusively, then turned from the man and looked at the decanters and glasses on the littered table. "Port, Brandy, Benedictine, Scotch. To be sure! to be sure! Who is to know the taste of a mere guest in the matter of his after-dinner drink? So, if it is put in *all*——" He took up the decanters one by one, sampled their contents in turn, and smiled one of his queer crooked smiles when he set the last one down.

"Clever, very clever, my friend," he said. "And who was to tell you that the guest would not drink at all?"

Then he turned on his heel suddenly and left the room.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE OPEN WINDOW

HE HAD scarcely taken a dozen steps down the hallway, however, before he encountered General Raynor, who had just then reëntered the house by the front door.

His rugged old face wore a look of deep anxiety, as though the exciting scene through which he had so recently passed bore heavily upon his spirits, despite Cleek's attempt to allay his distress by branding Dollops as a possible sneak thief; but he brightened perceptibly and made a valiant effort to appear quite at his ease when he looked up and saw Cleek.

"Get your call over the telephone all right, Mr. Barch?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Yes, thanks," said Cleek serenely, still keeping up his "Johnnie" air. "Awfully obliged to you, I'm sure. Dickens of an important message. Should have been in no end of a hole if I hadn't received it. But I say, General, you ought to be more careful, you know, especially with sneak thieves about."

"As how, Mr. Barch?"

"Why, that blessed swing window in the library. I found the thing unfastened, don't you know."

He hadn't, of course, for he had not been near it.

But his statement undeniably agitated the General, though he made a brave effort to disguise it.

"Did you? he said. "That's peculiar. I never noticed it. I must speak to Johnston about it; it's his duty to see that it is locked, and I supposed he had done so. Still, it's of no great consequence as it happens. The sneak thief didn't enter by that way, I am sure."

"No, but he might easily have done so; and if he had come in there while you were alone you might have had a warm time of it; don't you think so, eh, what?"

"I fancy *he* would have had a warm time of it, as you express it, Mr. Barch. I'm not so old but I know how to take care of myself, believe me."

"No, I suppose not," said Cleek. "Had a jolly lot of practice in your young days—with the gloves and all that. Forty-fifth Queen's Own used to have a national reputation for the best boxers and wrestlers in the service, I'm told. Suppose it was the same in your day; and you got a lot of practice out there in Simla in your subaltern days."

"You are wrong in both particulars. I did not belong to the Forty-fifth Queen's Own, Mr. Barch, and I was not billeted to India. I passed out of Sandhurst into the Imperial Blues, and from the time I was twenty-two until I was twenty-six I was stationed at Malta."

Cleek made a mental tally of those two statements.

"Oh, I see; mistake on my part," he said serenely.

"Malta was it? And the Imperial Blues? Thought Harry said the other. I've got a rotten memory. But it doesn't matter which, does it, so long as you learned the trick, and are able to put up a stiff fight and floor a burglar still? I'll lay you could floor one in short order, too, when I come to look at you," he went on, glancing the General up and down with apparent admiration. "Lord! shouldn't like to run foul of you when your temper's up. Built like a blessed gladiator. Shoulders on you like a giant; arms like—mind if I feel what they're like?"

Impudently taking hold of him before he could reply or resent the familiarity, Cleek moved the General's forearm up as if to see the swelling of the biceps.

"That's what I call muscle!" he exclaimed. "What a wrist! What a fist to floor a man or—— Hullo! been flooring some one since I left you, General? Big green smudge on your cuff, as if you'd been up against a mossy wall? Didn't get into a scrap with Sir Philip after I left you, did you, eh?"

There was no gainsaying it, the General's face grew absolutely white as he looked down and saw that green smudge on the white cuff which protruded beyond the sleeve of his evening coat. It was evident he had not noticed it before.

"No, certainly I have *not!*" he rapped out sharply as he plucked away his arm. "Sir Philip Clavering has gone home. And if you will pardon my saying it, Mr. Barch, I object to being handled."

"Awful sorry; did it before I thought," said Cleek vacantly. "No offence, eh? Because, you know, none was meant. Ought to have remembered; ought to have remembered half a dozen things when I come to think of it. One of 'em is that you and Sir Philip weren't likely to scrap like a couple of drunken navvies; and t'other is that you couldn't have got wall-moss on your cuff if you had, when there wasn't any wall where I left you. So you couldn't have got it there, of course."

"And as that settles it, I think we can abandon the subject with profit to both, Mr. Barch," said the General stiffly. "As a matter of fact, I don't know where nor how I did get the smudge; and it's of no consequence anyway. And now, if you will pardon me, I'll ring for Johnston to lock up the house—we always retire to bed early at the Grange, Mr. Barch—and have a wee drappie o' whisky and turn in. The evening has been unpleasantly eventful, and I feel the need of something in the way of stimulant."

"So do I, by Jove! Never drank a blessed drop to-night, didn't feel up to it, don't you know; but if you don't mind my toddling into the dining-room and helping myself——"

"By all means do so, Mr. Barch, by all means!" interposed the General with something akin to eagerness. "You will find plenty there. Help yourself."

"Thanks very much. But come to think of it, you haven't had a drink to-night, either. Told Hawkins you didn't feel like it, I recollect."

"No, I didn't at the time, but I certainly require it now; so if——"

"Good business!" interjected Cleek airily. "Come in and let's have one together. Harry's asleep, so I shan't have any company; and as I never like to drink alone, and you are my host, and there's plenty in the dining-room——"

"Pray don't think me discourteous, Mr. Barch," interposed the General blandly, "but I think I will take my whisky hot this evening; and as I make a practice of never taking a hot whisky until I am safely between the sheets, will you pardon me if I do not join you, but have mine served in my bedroom to-night?"

"Yes, certainly," said Cleek. "Only if I'm left to drink alone I'm apt to take two or three instead of one, and my doctor says I oughtn't to, don't you know."

"Doctors are not infallible, Mr. Barch; they often make errors. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Cleek. "But if I have a headache in the morning—oh, well, I can't help it. If I have one I'll have it I suppose. Here goes!" He walked back along the hall and went into the dining-room and shut the door, leaning heavily against it and breathing through his shut teeth the one word, "God!"

The footsteps of the General clicked off down the hall, but Cleek never stirred, never moved a muscle, until their dwindling sound dropped off into sudden

silence and all was still. Then, as softly as any cat, he twitched round, opened the door, closed it after him, and stood alone in the hall.

He moved on tiptoe to the library. The door was closed. He stopped and listened.

The faint rustling sound of papers told its own story. The General had not gone to his bedroom, he was in there!

With fleet, unsounding steps Cleek moved from that closed door to the open one of the drawing-room, remembering what Ailsa had said of how Mrs. Raynor had dozed over her coffee while they waited for him to come, and of how, after Hamer had carried in his note, the good lady had rallied the girl, and then gone off to bed because, she said, she was sleepy—sleepy at half-past eight o'clock!

Taking into consideration the events of the evening, he had counted upon the possibility of something happening; and the moment he entered that room and looked round him he knew that it had done so.

The butler's evening off; the excitement and distraction occasioned by that screaming police whistle sounding from the grounds and sending all the servants flocking out. These things had conspired to upset the routine of things as they should be in a well-regulated house; and lo! the silver tray and the coffee service and the cups, used and unused alike, had been overlooked, and there they still were, awaiting removal. And beside them stood a liqueur stand

with Chartreuse, Benedictine, Crême de Menthe, and a half-dozen tiny Venetian glasses.

Liqueurs with coffee! He went over and looked at the glasses; so much, so very much, depended upon that. If more than one had been used; if Ailsa, too, had taken liqueur—— No, she had not! Only one glass had been used, and Mrs. Raynor had gone to bed!

He rubbed the tip of his finger round the inner side of that one used glass, and put it to his tongue.

The wine and the spirits in the decanters on the table of the dining-room had all tasted alike. This liqueur tasted like them.

He made no comment, wasted no time. The instant he had decided that point he left the room and went back to the hall and to the gardens beyond the entrance.

Ailsa Lorne waited for him at the shrubbery; but it was not to the shrubbery he went! His way lay round the angle of the house, past the path to the ruin, past the windows of the dining-room where a drugged man lay, and on through the darkness, until he stood in the shelter of the trees directly opposite a broad stone terrace, upon which the swinging French window of the library gave.

It was bright with inner light, when first he came in sight of it; but he had barely halted before that light went out—and left it as black as pitch.

But a moment later Cleek drew farther back in the shadow of the trees.

He had warned General Raynor to be careful to lock that window, and now here he was not only disregarding that warning, but pushing the sashes wide apart.

"Coming again, is she, General?" said Cleek in the soundless words of thought. "A bad move, my friend, a very bad move. One may not recognize a man's voice from a simple 'Sh-h-h!' but when he steps out of a library with a black mud-spot on the toe of his house shoes and a green smudge on his cuff——"

He stopped and crouched back under the trees, and was very, very still.

Through the darkness a faint rustling sound had suddenly risen, the soft falling of a foot, the careful passage of a body between lines of leaves.

Some one was advancing cautiously toward that darkened and opened window.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE VIEW HALLOO

THAT the nocturnal visitor would prove to be Lady Clavering Cleek had not the smallest shadow of a doubt, although he marvelled much at her temerity in venturing into the grounds of the Grange after that experience at the wall door so short a time previously, and he therefore remained as breathless and as still as the shadows surrounding him, and waited the coming of events. Not, however, without some slight feeling of disappointment at the thought that, intricate and puzzling as this case had been, it now promised to be solved in such a tame and paltry manner; for if the newcomer should prove to be Lady Clavering, as, naturally, he had every reason for supposing, the affair would resolve itself into simply playing the part of eavesdropper at her interview with the General, and then making capital of the information thus obtained.

The intruder was advancing with extreme caution, but lacking his own peculiar gift of soundless stepping and noiseless movement, did not succeed in passing between hedge and coppice without the betraying rustle of disturbed leaves; and it was out

of this circumstance the mischief which followed was formed.

The shrubbery where Ailsa was waiting lay but a rope's cast distant from the spot where Cleek now crouched; and as if the ill-luck which had balked him once before to-night was intent upon flooring him at all quarters, he had no sooner grasped the unwelcome fact—made manifest by the clearer sound of the approaching body as it came into closer range—that the steps were advancing in a direct line with that shrubbery than a thin, eager whisper pierced the stillness.

It was the voice of Miss Lorne, saying cautiously, yet distinctly:

"Goodness gracious! Why, Purviss! You don't mean to tell me it's you?"

Purviss! Not Lady Clavering, but Geoff Clavering's old valet, Purviss! Here was a facer to be sure. Well, well, you never can tell which way a cat will jump, and that's a fact.

Purviss, eh? So he, too, was in the know, was he? Of course he must be, to be playing the rôle of Mercury and carrying messages between them in this secret manner. Cleek decided to have a look at Mr. Purviss, and a word or two as well, by George! For now, of course, he would make no attempt to go near that window.

The thought had no sooner presented itself to him than he acted upon it. With the speed of a hound, but with no more noise than a moving shadow, he

left his hiding-place, skirted the house, got round to the front of it, crawled up the steps, then, rising suddenly, appeared to come out of the doorway and down the steps whistling, as he descended to the gardens and moved leisurely along in the direction of the shrubbery.

When he was within a foot of it he suddenly stopped, pulled out his cigarette case, struck a match as if for the purpose of smoking, and by the aid of that light saw standing within a yard of him Miss Ailsa Lorne in close conversation with a mild-mannered, mild-faced elderly person, upon whom the word "valet" was clearly written.

"Hullo, Miss Lorne, enjoying an evening ramble, too? May I be allowed to join you?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Barch," said Ailsa. Then she motioned toward the valet, who had stepped meekly back.

"Purviss has just come over from Lady Clavering to inquire for Mr. Geoffrey——"

"Ah, yes," said Cleek, smiling to himself unnoticed in the dark. "He left this afternoon, did he not? You have evidently just missed Sir Philip, who was himself here."

"Yes," added Ailsa, "I was just telling him, but it seems he has a message for General Raynor from Lady Clavering——"

"I thought as much," said Cleek to himself triumphantly, though aloud he remarked, calmly enough: "Ah! but the General has gone to bed. I

heard him say that he was not to be disturbed, but if you care to give any message or letter, I'll go and knock him up."

"Oh, no, there's no need to do that, sir," replied Purviss hurriedly. "It's only a request for a gardening book if I happened to see General Raynor; of no importance at all, sir."

"I quite understand," said Cleek, the smile on his face hidden in the screening darkness.

"As for Mr. Geoffrey," put in Ailsa kindly, "he is quite safe. He went up to town on an errand for Lady Katharine——"

"Thank you, Miss," returned Purviss respectfully. "That will be a relief to her ladyship to know that. She was very anxious. Good-night, Miss! Good-night, sir!" With a deferential salute, the man turned and disappeared swiftly into the night.

"You see now," said Ailsa, "that I was right, that Geoff's absence would create such a panic at the Close that they would scour the place for news of him. First his father, and now Purviss. I thought you would be satisfied as to the truth of his mission directly I spoke."

"Yes," said Cleek quietly, "but he did not come here to seek Geoff Clavering. That was a lie. He came for the purpose of having an interview with some one else, and for the second time this night, Miss Lorne, you have unfortunately prevented me from hearing something which might have cleared this mystery up without any further search on my

part. You remember how I rushed past you at the time when Dollops had set me on the track of the lady in pink? She came and she had an interview, or, at least, she had the beginning of an interview, with the man she was there to see. What's that? No, she was not Margot. She was Lady Clavering. Sh-h-h! Quiet! Quiet! Yes, she was Lady Clavering. And she had just accused the man she came to meet of having murdered De Louvisan, when your approach startled the pair of them and made them separate hurriedly. Miss Lorne, can you stand a shock? Good! Then hold your nerves under tight control. The man Lady Clavering met at the wall door to-night was the master of this house, General Raynor!"

She all but collapsed when she heard that.

"General Raynor?" she breathed in a horrified voice. "General Raynor? And Lady Clavering? Oh, but why, but how? Dear Mr. Cleek, it—it is like some horrible dream! What possible connection could there be between those two people of all others?"

"I don't know. I have a suspicion—it is my business to have that, you know—but I want something stronger. I shall have it soon. My work here in this house is pretty well finished, I fancy. Maybe to-morrow, maybe the next day, but this week certain, I shall be off to Malta. I am going to hunt up a man's army record there."

"The General's?"

"Yes. His and—well, possibly, some one's else. When I come back I promise you that I will have the solution to this riddle in my hands. What's that? Oh, yes, Margot is in it."

"Then why—then how can Lady Clavering——"

"Lady Clavering, it appears, knows Margot. So does the General, evidently, for she mentioned her name to him."

"Dear heaven! And you say that she accused him of the murder? Accused him? How could she?"

"She was there—at Gleer Cottage—last night. She went there to meet him. But she was not, however, the first to direct my suspicions against the General. That was done hours before and by a totally different person."

"Whom?"

"His son," said Cleek, and forthwith told her of that memorable interview with Harry Raynor after dinner, and of the typewritten letter he had abstracted from the young wastrel's coat pocket. "Miss Lorne, I waste no sympathy upon that worm," he went on. "From the top of his empty head to the toe of his worthless foot there's not one ounce of manhood in him. But he spoke the truth! His father did type that forged letter and for the purpose he declared."

"To get him out of the neighbourhood for the night?"

"Yes. And but for the mere accident of the fellow's having discovered that the typist girl was out

of England, he would have succeeded without having to resort to other means."

"How do you know that the General typed the letter?" asked Miss Lorne.

"I didn't in the beginning," returned Cleek. "I did know, however, that it had been typed by somebody in this house; for I stole the letter, then tricked Hamer into getting me an unused sheet of the typing paper that was left over from the manuscript of the General's book. A glance at the watermark showed them to be identical; in other words, that the letter had been typed upon one of those left-over sheets. Well, that was one thing; the other was that the General, having failed to get his son out of the way for to-night by that means, took steps to accomplish it by drugging him."

"Drugging him?"

"Yes. Earlier in the day Purviss had brought him a note from Lady Clavering, and it was imperative that he should go out to-night to meet her in secret. He didn't want his son prowling about, and he didn't want me prowling about, either. Still less did he want you prowling about, or that his wife should know of his leaving the house after she had gone to bed. To make sure of having no such risk to run, he put a sleeping draught into every drop of spirit or liqueur that was served in this house to-night. What he had not reckoned upon, however, was the fact that neither you nor I tasted either. But at this moment his son lies drugged and uncon-

scious in the dining-room, and it would be a safe hazard to stake one's life that his wife is lying unconscious in bed."

"But—but—are you *sure* there is no mistake?"

"No, Miss Lorne, there is no mistake. It was the General who did the drugging. I found the paper in which the sleeping draught had come from the chemist's in the waste basket in the library; and when I wanted to clench the belief and make it absolutely positive, I tricked the General into confessing that he stood in need of a stimulant after the stress of the night, then invited him to join me in one from the decanters in the dining-room. He knew what was in that liqueur and—he declined. I knew then that there was no mistake about his being the hand that had done the drugging, just as I had known previously that he was the man Lady Clavering had met at the wall door.

"When I rushed past you that time and raced through these grounds, I had no more idea than a child unborn who the man I was pursuing would prove to be. He might have been Harry Raynor; he might have been Lord St. Ulmer. I even said to myself that he might be any male member of this household from the General down; and my one idea was to get to the house and to find which man was missing. I found no one absent! St. Ulmer was in his bedroom; Harry Raynor was sleeping over the table in the dining-room; and as I came clattering down the stairs the General stepped out of the library

to inquire into the cause of the disturbance. To all intents and purposes he had been in there reading the whole evening long. But it was a significant fact that as he opened the door and came out, I was able to see past him into the room and to discern that the curtains drawn over the swinging window were bellying inward, showing that the opening of the door had started a current of air which could be created only by the window behind them being likewise open.

"That gave me the first suspicion of a clue. I looked at the man himself for further evidence to back it up and, in the first glance, found it. There was black soil on the toes of his house shoes and a smudge of green wall-moss on his shirt cuff! I knew then just what he had done, and how I had failed to overhaul him in that hot race. He had simply ducked down out of sight, lain still in the bushes and allowed me to run past him. For me there was, of course, no other means of entering the house but by the door; for him there was the library window! He waited to give me time to get into the house, then rose, ran across the intervening space and back into the library by means of that window, and had had just about sufficient time to get there when I came rushing down the stairs. You will remember, will you not, that I spoke of those two things: the spot of black and smudge of green? You know now to what I alluded."

"It is wonderful and—yes, it is horrible also!" she said with a faint shudder. "What a day of horror

this has been! I think the shadow of it will weigh upon me forever."

"Not if I can help it," said Cleek very gently, very tenderly. "And I count very, very much indeed, Miss Lorne, upon the possibility of making you bless it before the whole twenty-four hours of it have been rounded out. Don't you remember what I said to you about my hopes for the clearing of all shadows from the path of Geoff Clavering and Lady Katharine, about the theory of Loisette?"

"Loisette? That is the great French scientist, is it not? The first man who actually did establish a standard rule for the training of the memory and schools for the teaching of his system all over the world?"

"Yes, that is the man. His principle is somewhat akin to that of the principle of homœopathy. 'Like cures like,' says the homœopathist. 'Like produces like,' says Loisette, 'and the similarity of events acting upon the human mind may, by suggestion, produce similar results.' Well, last night Lady Katharine Fordham went through an experience which no living woman is ever likely to forget: the knowledge that hope of happiness is over, and that the man she loves is lost to her beyond all possible recall. This evening, in the ruin over there, she went through an exactly similar experience, and after some few hours of hope, was thrust rudely back into the absolute certainty that a barrier as high as heaven itself had come between Geoff Clavering and her. I

stake my hopes upon that, Miss Lorne. I look for Loisette to be vindicated. I look for last night to be repeated *in all particulars*, and I am so hopeful of it that I have sent for Geoff Clavering to come here and be a witness to it."

"Sent for Geoff Clavering to come here—here?"

"Yes. At twelve o'clock he will be waiting for me at the lodge gates; and if all goes as I hope and believe that it will go—ah, well, it will be a blessed time for him, for her, for you! As for myself—but that doesn't matter. I shall have but one more thing to accomplish under the roof of this house, and then if the trail leads elsewhere, I'll be off to Malta as fast as steam can take me."

"And that one thing, Mr. Cleek? May I ask what it is?"

"Yes, certainly. It is to discover Lord St. Ulmer's part in this elusive business, and then to be absolutely certain of getting at the man who killed the Count de Louvisan, and at the reason for the crime."

"The reason? The man?" repeated Ailsa in utter bewilderment. "I thought you said just now that you were satisfied regarding that? Why, then, should you speak as if there were a possibility of Lord St. Ulmer being concerned in the murder if you are seemingly so sure that General Raynor did it?"

"General Raynor? Good heavens above, Miss Lorne, get that idea out of your mind! Why, General Raynor is no more guilty of the murder of De Louvisan than you are!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

LOISETTE IS VINDICATED

AILSA caught her breath with a faint, little, sobbing sigh at this, and even if the moon had not chosen just then to slip out from the screen of the enveloping clouds and throw a dusk of silver over everything, so that he could see her face and the deep look of relief in her uplifted eyes, he still would have known what a load his declaration of the General's innocence had lifted from her mind.

"Oh, I am so glad," she said fervently; "so very, very glad! Do you know, I made sure from the manner in which you spoke that, horrible as it seemed, it must surely be he; that you must certainly have discovered something which left no room for doubt in your own mind; otherwise you would not have told me all these terrible things regarding the forged letter and the drugged drink and his meeting with Lady Clavering at the wall door. And now to know that you do not suspect him, that you are sure it was not he that killed De Louvisan, ah, I can't tell you how glad I am."

"How loyal you are to your friends," he said admiringly. "You needn't assure me of your gladness;

I can read it in your voice and face. No, General Raynor is not guilty, although I am very positive that he not only was out last night, but was actually at Gleer Cottage; but I am absolutely certain his was not the hand that killed De Louvisan. I will even go further, and say that it would not surprise me to learn that he was not even present at the time of the killing, though there is, of course, always the possibility, in the light of my theory of the whys and wherefores of the case, that he was."

"You have a theory regarding it, then?"

"Yes. I had a vague one in the beginning that became more pronounced when I heard Lady Clavering speak of 'letters' in her interview with the General at the wall door to-night. She also spoke of Margot, recollect. And I have said from the first that a woman was in it."

"And you think that she—that Margot—did it?"

"Did what—the murder? No, I do not. As a matter of fact, I am beginning to believe that the presence of that crafty female in England, and in this particular neighbourhood at this particular time, may possibly have led me to leap to a conclusion which is a long way from the truth. That she meant to see De Louvisan, and, with the aid of her band, deal pretty harshly with him—give him the 'traitor's spike,' in fact—I feel very nearly positive; but I am now beginning to realize there is a possibility that the scrap of pink gauze may not have come from Margot's dress, and that she may not have been at Gleer Cottage

last night, after all. In other words, that the woman in the case is not Margot."

"Who then? Lady Clavering?"

"Possibly. There is, however, a chance that it is not even she."

All in a moment Ailsa flamed up.

"You are leaving only Kathie," she said with spirit. "And if you were an angel from heaven you could not make me believe it is she. I know you declare that she was at Gleer Cottage last night; that you say Geoff swears he met her there; but even so——"

"Oh, thank you for reminding me of that dear boy," interjected Cleek, whipping out his watch and glancing at it. "If he keeps his promise, as he doubtless will, he'll be at the lodge gates in exactly twelve minutes, Miss Lorne. And there is another 'dear boy' to consider too, my poor Dollops, who's probably waiting at the wall angle for me to explain my change of tactics with regard to the arrest and release of Sir Philip Clavering. Will you pardon me if I rush off and see him for a few minutes? I'll be back here to join you as quickly as I can, and then, if you will honour me, we'll be off together to the lodge gates to meet Geoff Clavering."

He did not wait for her to reply; did not stop to make any comment upon her remarks regarding Lady Katharine. Moving off as briskly as if he were endeavouring to evade that subject, he slipped soundlessly away through the shrubbery and was gone before she could speak. He was absent for

something like eight or ten minutes; then as silently and as abruptly as he had left her side he issued from the bushes and returned to it.

"Shall we go to meet Geoff?" he asked; and again scarcely waiting for her to reply, led the way in silence.

It was on the tip of Ailsa's tongue to ask him if, after so often expressing his conviction of Lady Katharine's innocence and admitting to-night that he had changed his opinion with regard to one woman's part in this elusive riddle, he had suddenly changed it regarding her, too, when, without preface of any sort, he looked round at her.

"Rum how we English stick to precedent, isn't it?" he said. "Ever remark how faithfully old footmen cling to their 'calves' and old valets cleave to their little black side-whiskers? And, I say, Miss Lorne! what's the fashion in evening petticoats these days? Coloured ones, I mean. Do they have to match the dress that's worn with them or not?"

"Certainly they don't," said Ailsa, looking round at him in surprise. "Good gracious, Mr. Cleek, whatever in the world are you thinking about?"

"I? Oh, nothing in particular. There we are at the lodge gates at last; and here's our man. Come in, bonny boy, come in."

Geoff came up out of the shadow of the two big trees at the entrance and moved swiftly toward the gates.

"Wait a bit," went on Cleek. "I've got a skeleton

key handy, and in two shakes of a ram's tail—— Told you so! In with you, my lad. Miss Lorne's here with me; and if Loisette wasn't a dreamer and I'm not a fool, you'll be the happiest chap in England to-night. Sh-h-h! don't speak. Walk on your toes, take to the grass, keep in the shadow of the hedge, and get over there to that shrubbery as quickly and as noiselessly as you can. With you in a minute, my boy."

He was. Stopping just long enough to relock the gates and to motion Ailsa to accompany him, he travelled like a fleet-moving shadow across the lawn, and was again with Geoff Clavering.

"Well, here I am as you requested, you see, Mr. Barch," said Geoff. "I don't know what in the world you meant when you told me that thing over the telephone; but whatever it is that's going to make Kathie and me as happy as you promised, I'm ready enough to hear it, God knows."

"Yes, God does know; you're right there, my boy. He knows that Lady Katharine did call you into Gleer Cottage last night, and did send you into the room where that dead man's body hung; and—oh, yes, she did, Miss Lorne. He'll tell you that just as he told me; won't you, Clavering, eh?"

"Yes," said Geoff, and did forthwith, giving all the details just as he had given them to Cleek hours earlier in the General's famous ruin.

"Will you believe now, Miss Lorne?" said Cleek, and then paused and gave a little, shaky, half-sup-

pressed laugh. For, of a sudden, a cuckoo's note had risen softly over the stillness, sounding thrice in rapid succession, as if the bird had mistaken the moon's glamour for the sheen of day dawn, and had sent forth this untimely call.

Hearing it, Cleek knew that what he had so fervently hoped might come to pass really *had* come to pass, and that the theory of Loisette was about to be vindicated.

"Or, if you will not," he said, taking up the sentence just where the bird note had broken off, "come with me and find proof of it for yourself. Come quickly. Hold your breath. Walk on your toes. Don't make a sound on your lives. This way. Quickly. Come."

He took them each by the hand and, leading the way, passed on tiptoe with them out of the shrubbery and down the hedged path to the mimic ruin. The figure of Dollops rose out of the shadow of it as they came upon the place, moved fleetly and quietly to Cleek's side, and then as quietly slipped round behind him into the shade of the trees.

"All right, gov'ner," he whispered softly. "Over to the left there. Give you the signal the minute I spotted her. Lie low, all of you. Here she comes!"

"Here who comes?" Ailsa and Geoff spoke in concert.

"Lord, I dunno, miss," replied Dollops in a whisper. "Gov'ner said, 'Look sharp for a lady in white,

and "cuckoo" when she appears.' Dunno no more than that."

Ailsa flashed round and looked at Cleek.

"Yes, Miss Lorne," he said, answering that look. "Lady Katharine Fordham! She did steal out of the house last night, and—Loisette is right. The mirror of to-night, reflecting the counterpart of yesterday, is duplicating events. Her ladyship is stealing out of the house again, and on the selfsame mission: to visit Gleer Cottage. She will certainly wear a cloak, though not an ermine one, to-night. I looked out to see that one was placed in the anteroom, to make sure of that. Quiet, quiet, all of you! Not a sound, not a breath! Look sharp! You'll see her presently!"

They saw her even then. Of a sudden a footstep sounded, the rustle of moved leaves disturbed the stillness, then the figure of Lady Katharine rounded the angle of the ruin, and advanced toward them with great deliberation. A long dark cloak covered her almost to the feet, the hood of it being drawn up over her head until its loose frill framed her face; but it was easy to see, as she advanced, that under that cloak she wore a gown of white satin and slippers with sparkling buckles on the toes. She came into view so suddenly, and was walking so rapidly, that she was upon them almost as they saw her, walking straight to them, walking straight by them, within touch of them, yet seeming not to care or even to notice, and taking the path which led to the stable gate, to the waste land beyond, and thence to Gleer Cot-

tage. It was then, when she had deliberately walked past them, then, and then only, that Ailsa understood.

"Dear God!" she said in a shaking whisper as she plucked at Cleek's sleeve. "She does not know, she does not understand. She is asleep, Mr. Cleek!"

"Yes," he made answer. "You know now why she looked so haggard and weary this morning, despite her assurance that she had slept well. Poor little woman; poor unhappy little woman! A sleep-walker, Clavering—and going back where her heart leads her: to the cottage where she had often spent those happier days when she was so sure of love and of you!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

"QUICK! FIRE!"

GEOFF did not reply; he could not. As if the sight of that slow-moving figure, linked with the realization which had now come upon him, had wrought a curious numbing effect upon mind and heart alike, he simply stood there, breathing hard, and looked, and looked, and looked, but said no single word. Even Dollops could see that there was a glint of something wet and shining in the crease beside his eye, and that, in spite of tears, he smiled as a man might smile if he had waked to find that all the world was his. It was Ailsa that made the first sound, spoke the first word.

"Oh, Mr. Cleek, to think that she should be a somnambulist," she said with a little catch in her voice, as if she were laughing and sobbing at the same time and fighting hard to do neither. "And to think that you should have guessed it when even I, her dearest and closest friend, never suspected it for an instant."

"Oh, as for that, Miss Lorne, I really deserve very little credit indeed," he made answer.

For a moment he followed with his eyes the departing figure of Lady Katharine as it moved fleetly

along the path to the stable quarters, where stood the stile giving access to the paddock and thence, by a far-away wall door, to the waste land of the open country beyond.

"If anybody is to be praised for the discovery of the truth as manifested to-night," he went on presently, "that praise should go to Loisette alone. He has said—that wise Frenchman—that 'the likeness of events acting upon a highly strung and overwrought mind is likely to produce exactly similar results.' There is his vindication before you. Last night all hope of happiness was smitten out of that poor girl's mind by the affair at Clavering Close and the certainty that she had lost the man she loves forever. This morning new hope came; this evening that new hope was dashed to earth again by her interview with this dear boy, and the future looked blacker and more hopeless than ever. The 'likeness of events' had come; there is the 'likeness of result' before you. Back into her ball dress, back into her cloak, back into everything that had to do with that other time; there she goes now back to Gleer Cottage as well!"

"God!" said Geoff, with a queer sort of sob; then leaned his curved arm against a tree trunk and hid his face in the crook of it. "And to think what I said to her, what I thought of her! I ought to be kicked for a brute. And yet I wouldn't have hurt her for all the world—my dear, dear girl!"

"Buck up, my boy, buck up!" said Cleek, patting him on the shoulder. "The world can do with all

the brutes of your kind that can be created; for they make good sons, good husbands, and loyal gentlemen! She said, did she not, that she would 'show you something that would light the way back to the land of happiness'? Well, she's doing it, my boy; and if you were to follow her this minute you'd find history repeating itself down to the smallest detail. Only, you *mustn't* follow her; you mustn't let history repeat itself, Clavering. Gleer Cottage is not in the same lonely and unwatched state to-night that it was in last night. The police are there. They mustn't see what happens, because I've a fancy for keeping some things with regard to this case off the annals of Scotland Yard and out of the courts of England. You must stop her, you and Miss Lorne."

"Stop her? How? Isn't it dangerous to wake a sleep-walker?"

"Yes, if it's done rudely. But people in that condition will answer questions, and—— Who spoke first, when you met last night?"

"Why, I did, of course. I was so bowled over when I looked up and recognized her that I said: 'Kathie! Great Scott, is it you?' before I thought. That's how she came to speak to me."

"Then go and say it again," advised Cleek. "When she answers, suggest to her that you sit down and wait for a moment, as you promised you would do, until Miss Lorne could join you. Once she sits, be sure the desire to walk will pass away; she will gradually sink into the natural position for sleeping

and will sleep soundly for a time. As for the rest, you may rely upon the coldness and the hardness of the earth to half arouse her, and it will be but a step from that to complete wakefulness if Miss Lorne begins to sing very, very softly and to rustle the leaves as she comes up and joins you both. Now then, off with you, my boy, and move as softly as you can until you come up with her and speak."

Geoff did not hesitate. He only paused to look back at Cleek and say: "By Jove, you know, you are a ripping chap!" and then was off on tiptoe after Lady Katharine.

Watching, they saw him come up with her at last, and knew when he spoke by the manner in which she stopped and looked round at him; they saw her put a finger to her lips and nod and beckon, and knew when he spoke again and suggested the things that Cleek had advised, by the listless manner in which she let her hands drop, the wavering uncertain way in which she stood swaying and looking straight before her.

Then, after a moment or two—they could have cheered had they dared—they saw her look round in the direction of a little knoll to which Geoff pointed and then placidly turn and walk with him toward it.

"Oh, what a dear, dear friend you are!" said Ailsa, impulsively, as she looked round and up at Cleek, with tears in her eyes and a face all smiling. "I wonder which is your greater side—your shrewdness or your humanity?"

"I can tell you which is my weaker one," he smiled,

looking down upon her with eyes that spoke to hers. "And maybe, some day if you will let me do so—— But that's another story, as our friend Mr. Kipling puts it. Wait! Don't go yet, Miss Lorne. Before you start to join them and to play your little part in the drama of Lady Katharine's awaking, there's one more favour to be asked. Afterward you will understand why I ask this thing; for the present I want only your promise that you will unquestioningly obey. Will you give me that promise? Thank you, I felt sure that you would.

"You know the old saying: a bird that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing. Equally, then, a door that can be opened and will not open by persuasion or by threats, must be compelled to open by trickery and craft. I am going to commit an act of violence under the roof of Wuthering Grange to-night, Miss Lorne. I'm going to do a thing that men get sent to prison for, and justly, too, if they are found out; only that I am not going to carry my act into full completion: merely make a bluff at it, as it were.

"Meanwhile I want you to promise me that as soon as you have awakened Lady Katharine and have made her understand that she did go to Gleer Cottage last night and really has been walking in her sleep, you will find a pretext—you and Geoff Clavering, between you—to get her as far from the neighbourhood as possible for the next two or three hours. Yes, Clavering Close will do. Any place will do so that neither she nor he is within hailing distance of

this house when my 'act of violence' is committed. Try to do this if possible, Miss Lorne; more than you dream of hinges upon it. In any case, promise me that no matter what excitement is created you will not venture near the house and will prevail upon them not to do so either. Will you?"

"Yes, certainly I will. And if I tell Geoff that it is your wish, I' m sure I may promise for him as well."

"Thank you. That's all. Now I'll be off about my business. You see"—nodding in the direction of the paddock—"Geoff has persuaded her to sit. Good luck to your little 'singing tour,' and God bless you. Good-bye. This way, Dollops! Move sharp!"

Speaking, he swung off into the darkness, with the boy following close upon his heels, and forged on in the direction of the wall angle, there to wait until his instructions were acted upon and it was time for him to play his last great card.

And lo, as they went, a sweet, soft voice rose in murmuring melody behind them and they could just distinguish the words, "Kathleen Mavourneen, the gray dawn is breaking," so softly Ailsa sang them as she passed on in the direction of the paddock stile.

"A good, true woman that, Dollops," said Cleek, pausing to listen. "And there's nothing better in heaven or out of it than a good woman, my lad. Always remember that."

"Yes, sir," said Dollops softly and refraining from further comment.

Cleek laughed to himself as they took the angle path again. "I know the secret of the universe at last, my lad," he said softly. "The way to heaven is through a good woman's eyes!" Then he laughed again, and spoke no more until they were at their journey's end.

"Now, then, my embryo Vidocq," he began, halting in the shadow of the wall angle and laying a gentle hand on Dollops's shoulder, "a word or two with you. I think you told me earlier in the evening that Mr. Narkom had gone back to town, did you not? Did he say if he'd be returning to Wimbledon to-night or not? I fancy he will be likely to, considering his interest in the Claverings, but did he say he would?"

"Yes, sir. Said he'd be back somewheres between nine and ten, sir; that he'd drop in at the police station, and if there was a need for him, he said I'd find him there."

"Right you are! Well, there *is* a need for him, Dollops; for him and for the limousine, too. So off with you, my boy, and tell him to be here, at this spot, as quickly as he can; and to be ready when I call for him. Now then," said Cleek, opening the wall door, "off with you as fast as you can travel."

For some minutes Cleek stood in deep thought, then he turned and walked quickly back into the house. He had made up his mind to beard Lord St. Ulmer in his room, and his quick brain was intent on a plan by which he should secure an entry. Three

minutes later he stood outside the door and placed a bunch of extinguished matches at the foot of it, while he called softly but piercingly.

"Lord St. Ulmer! Quick! *Quick! Fire!* The place is on fire."

His heart pounded as he waited, for if the man were asleep his efforts would be fruitless. Suddenly, however, there came a faint sound to his straining ears, and again he whispered in that sibilant whisper:

"Lord St. Ulmer, *fire!*"

He did not have time to repeat it, for there came the sound as of an extremely agile man leaping from his bed, and another moment he heard the snick of an unfastened lock, then the door opened.

Cleek waited not a second, his foot was in the narrow aperture, and he was through the door and had switched on the light before the other man had realized what had happened. Then he gave vent to a little low laugh of triumph as with his back against the closed door he surveyed the white-faced man who had retreated to the middle of the room.

"Good evening! Citizen Paul, good brother Apache, so it is you, is it?" he said airily. "Let us have a quiet little understanding, *mon ami.* You need not be distressed. There is no fire. It is merely a bluff. What! You do not know me. But wait! Look!" The serene face writhed suddenly, and it was as if another man took his place. "Ever see a chap that looked like this, friend Paul, eh?"

"God! The Cracksman!"

"The identical party!" acknowledged Cleek blandly. "Come! I want to have a few minutes' talk with you, my friend, and—— Stop! Don't back away! Stop and face me. By God! you'll hang for last night's business if you don't!"

CHAPTER THIRTY

NEARING THE TRUTH!

IT WAS one o'clock when Mr. Maverick Narkom, pacing uneasily up and down the narrow strip of turf just outside the boundary wall of Wuthering Grange, saw the door at the wall angle flash open and shut again, and without so much as a murmur of sound looked up to find Cleek standing within a few paces of him.

"My dear fellow! Gad, I never was so glad to see anybody in all my days," exclaimed the superintendent, swooping down on him in a little whirlwind of excitement. "Cinnamon! You'll never guess what's happened, Cleek, never! After all my instructions, those blundering idiots of local police were too late to catch Margot and her crew at Wimbledon, the house where young Raynor visited, as you wrote me. I went down myself directly Dollops brought me your note, but it was too late, the police had frightened her in some way——"

"It does not matter," said Cleek calmly. "I have come to the end of the riddle."

"The end?" gasped Mr. Narkom. "The end! Man alive, tell me who——"

"Patience, my friend; perhaps I ought not to have

said that yet, some few things remain to be discovered, but the first thing to do is to carry out the murderer's message before it is too late, or the letters get into the wrong hands."

"Whose letters?" exclaimed Mr. Narkom, naturally bewildered.

"The woman who lured Count de Louvisan, though that is not his name, to his death, Lady Clavering——"

"Lady Clav—— Heavens, man, what possible motive could she have?"

"We shall see, my friend, if my ideas are right. Call up Lennard and the limousine and let us go down to the cottage. With one more thread in my hand, and then to-night will see the knot unravelled."

With this Mr. Narkom was fain to be content, and once in the car, the few minutes that elapsed before they reached Gleer Cottage were passed in silence. At the gate, when the limousine drew up, Cleek aroused himself from his reverie.

"Mr. Narkom, get the constables stationed on duty near that room out of the way. Put them outside somewhere where they won't be able to see or hear what goes on at the back of the house. Then make an excuse of having to examine the body in reference to some new evidence that's just cropped up. I'll join you there in one minute."

Mr. Narkom gave a nod of comprehension and vanished up the path, leaving his great ally to carry out his plans in his own inimitable fashion.

That was the last the superintendent saw of him until full twenty minutes later when, with his customary soundlessness, he came up out of the gloom of the neglected garden, entered the rear door of the cottage, and joined him in the room where the body of the dead man still hung, spiked to the wall, with knees bent, head lolling, and the lantern in Narkom's hand splashing a grotesque shadow of him on the side of the chimney breast.

Cleek walked over to that ghastly human crucifix and regarded the dead man bitterly, his lips puckered, and his whole expression one of unspeakable contempt.

"So it has come to this at last, has it, De Morcerf?" he said, half audibly. "Well, was it worth the price, do you think? Peace to you, or, at least, such peace as you deserve. You've paid your scot and passed out eternally. As for the rest—— Mr. Narkom!"

"Yes, old chap?"

"I noticed last night, when I was down on my knees following the trail of the *Huile Violette*, that there was a section of the flooring which has evidently been raised lately, as it was fastened down with new nails. Locate the place for me—it's over there somewhere—and stand there while I do a little measuring and counting."

Narkom moved over in the direction indicated, searched about for a time with a magnifying glass, and finally announced the discovery of the place he had been set to look for.

"Good heavens above, old chap, how you notice things! Fancy your remarking that when you were looking for something totally different! I say what on earth are you doing?"

"Measuring," replied Cleek, stepping off the distance between the spot where the body hung and that where Narkom knelt. "Three feet, one yard; three yards—— No, that won't do. 'Nine feet from the body' doesn't work out, so it's not that. Nine paces are impossible—room's too short—and nine boards—— Hum-m-m! That's poorer than the rest—doesn't go half the way. Clearly then, if my theory is correct, it's *not* the body that's the starting point. How about the mantelpiece then? Let's have a try. Nine feet? No go! Nine boards, then? Oh, piffle! that's worse than ever. It leads off in a totally different direction. But stop a bit! These boards run up and down the room, not across it; and as it is undoubted that the measurement goes to the left, why, two and four make six. Hum-m-m! Six feet from the corner of the mantelpiece to—— Hullo! that brings me exactly opposite to where you stand, doesn't it? And counting the board between us runs to—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine! Exactly nine boards across the room! Got it, by Jupiter! Three paces from the body bring one to the mantelpiece. And paces are usually designated in a diagram by X's. And nine boards across the room does the trick! Letters, she said, letters! That was the first clue. Letters that might

fall into Margot's hands; and as that dead wretch was Margot's ally once upon a time, and might threaten to give the things over to her if his demands were not acceded to—— Victoria! He will have hidden them there, unless I'm the biggest kind of an ass, and can no longer put two and two together!"

Speaking, he moved rapidly across the room to the spot where Narkom stood, knelt, and in five minutes' time had the board up. Under it there lay something tied up in an old white silk handkerchief; and when the knots of that were unfastened three thick packets of yellow, time-discoloured letters, tied up with old neckties and frayed silken shoelaces, tumbled out upon the floor. One and all were addressed to "M. Anatole de Villon," and were written in a woman's hand.

Cleek snapped the binding of the first bundle, looked at the signature appended to the letters, and then passed them over to Narkom.

"There is the answer to the riddle," he said. "Poor soul—poor, poor unhappy soul! Under God, she shall suffer no more from this night on! And he would have sold her—sold her for money had he lived."

Narkom made no reply in words. He simply glanced at the signature attached to the first letter, then sucked in his breath with a sort of shuddering sigh, and grew very, very still.

"Let's get out!" said Cleek in a sharp, biting voice. "I can't breathe in the presence of that dead beast

any longer. 'Who breaks pays!' Yes, by God, he does!"

He turned and got out of the room, out of the house, and forged back through the darkness toward the spot where the limousine waited.

Halfway up the lane Narkom overtook him.

"Cleek, dear chap," he said, plucking him by the sleeve, "in the name of heaven, what is to be done now? The man is my friend. He believes in her; he loves her; and on my soul I believe that she loves him. Dear old chap, isn't there something better and nobler than human justice, something higher than the laws of man?"

"Yes," said Cleek, "a great deal higher. There's God and there's humanity. The woman has paid and paid and paid, as erring women must always do; but if I can help it, she shall pay no longer. I tell you I will compound a felony that her secret may be kept."

"And I'll assist you in it, old chap; I'll compound it with you!" said Narkom with quiet impressiveness. "Not because the man is my friend, Cleek, but because—oh, well, because the woman is a *woman!*"

"And they have a hard road to travel at best," supplemented Cleek. "So let's give a sorely tried one a lift and a bit of sunlight on the long, dark way! You see how it came about, do you not? She made the appointment with him to meet her at Gleer Cottage because it was a lonely as well as a convenient

spot. I dare say that when he learned the character of the place it struck him as being a safe one in which to hide the letters in case of any attempt being made to steal them from him. When he set out earlier than the appointed hour for that purpose, the—well, *the other party* was on the watch and saw where they were put, yet didn't have an opportunity to remove them at once, so marked the clue down in that particular manner on the dead man's bosom, in order to tell Margot that she had been avenged and the letters hidden. I will tell you the story presently, but first let us get back to General Raynor."

"Raynor!" ejaculated Mr. Narkom, "Surely it was not he who——"

"Committed the murder," finished Cleek. "No, luckily for him, he found it already committed. No, it is these letters that he wanted. Here we are at the limousine at last, thank fortune. The Grange, Lennard, as fast as you can make it, my lad."

Lennard got there in record time, depositing them at the gates in something less than a quarter of an hour later. And here Dollops, who was patiently waiting in the shadow of the wall, rose to meet them as they alighted.

"Gawd's truth, gov'ner, is it you at last? I've been nigh off my biscuit wonderin' wot 'ad become of you, sir," he began as he approached; and would probably have said more but that Cleek interrupted him.

"No time for talking now, Dollops," said he.

"We are at the end of the trail and even moments count. Into the limousine with you, my lad, and let Lennard drive you over to Clavering Close. Ask for Miss Lorne when you get there, and give her this message. Say that she and Lady Katharine are to stop where they are until I come for them in person. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. And when I've done that, wot next, if you please?"

"Go home and go to bed; that's all. Good-night. Cut along!"

The boy and the limousine were gone like a flash.

"Come along, Mr. Narkom. Let us go and pay our respects to the General," said Cleek; then he pushed open the gates and passed into the grounds, with the agitated superintendent trotting along by his side.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

HOW THE TRUTH WAS TOLD

IN THE closed and curtained library General Raynor paced up and down, silent, anxious, alone, his nerves raw, his face haggard, his eyes brightening with expectancy every time a breeze shook or bellied the draperies hanging over the open window, but dimming again when they sagged back into position without anything coming of their disturbance.

"Waiting, you see," said Cleek in a whisper as he and Narkom emerged from the screen of the trees, and saw the chink of light made by the wind-blown curtains, and the shadow which moved back and forth and momentarily blotted it. "Poor old chap! He must be suffering torments. Come on! Step lightly! Make no noise until we are at the window's ledge. This is the end of his waiting at last!"

Evidently the General was of that opinion, also, when, a few moments later, he heard a footstep on the gravel, and, halting to listen and to make sure, heard that footstep come on and up the terrace steps. With a quick intaking of the breath and a whispered, "Is it you? Is it you at last?" he moved fleetly to the window, twitched aside the curtains, and let the guarded light streak outward into the night.

It fell full upon two men—Cleek and Narkom—standing within an arm's reach of the indrawn sashes and the divided drapery.

A flash of sudden pallor, followed quickly by an angry flush, passed over the General's face as he saw and recognized Cleek.

"Really, Mr. Barch, this is carrying your little pleasantries too far," he rapped out in a voice that had a little tremble in it. "Will you allow me to say that we are not accustomed to guests who get up and prowl about the place at all hours of the night, and turn up suddenly at half-past one in the morning with uninvited acquaintances."

"Quite so," said Cleek, "but the law is no respecter of any man's convenience, General."

"The law? The law?" The General's sudden fright was pitiful. He dropped back a step under the shock of the thing, and all the colour drained out of his lips and cheeks. "What utter absurdity! What have I to do with the law? What have you, Mr. Barch?"

"Cleek, if you want the truth of it, General—Cleek of the Forty Faces, Cleek of Scotland Yard. It's time to lay aside the mask of 'Philip Barch' forever."

"Cleek? Cleek?" The General's cry was scarcely more than a shrill whisper. "God! You that man? You? And all the time you have been here in my house. Oh, my God! is this the end?"

"Yes, I fear it is, General," said Cleek in reply, as

he stepped past him and moved into the room. "If you dance to the devil's music in your youth, my friend, be sure he will come round with the hat in the days of your age! Last night one of the follies of your youth came to its inevitable end: last night a man was murdered who—— Stop! Doors won't lead a man out of his retribution. Come away from that one. The gentleman who is with me, General, is Mr. Maverick Narkom, superintendent of Scotland Yard. Isn't that enough to show you how impossible it is to evade what is to be? Besides, why should you want to get out of the room? It's not your life that's in danger, it's your honour; and there's no need to make any attempt to prevent either your wife or your son learning that when both are deep in the drugged sleep to which you sent them."

"My God!" The General collapsed into a chair.

"That's right," said Cleek. "Sit down to it, General, for it is likely to be a strength-sapping time. I've something to say to you; and Mr. Narkom has still something to hear. But first, for the sake of emergencies, and to have things handy if required, allow me to take a certain precaution."

As he spoke he moved over to the window, and switched the curtains over them.

"General," he said, facing about again, "the laws of society, the laws which prevail in civilized communities, are pretty rotten things. If a woman errs in her youth she pays for it all her whole life long—

in sorrow, in tears, in never-ceasing disgrace. If the same law prevailed for both sexes, and men had to pay for the sins of their youth as women must for theirs, how many of them think you would be out of sackcloth to-day? Atonement is for the man, never for the woman. For Eve, youth must stand always as a time of purity, unspotted by a single sin. For Adam, it stands only as a time of folly that may be brushed aside and of sin that may be outlived. Probably you were no worse in the days of your youth, General, than ninety-nine men out of every hundred, but——" He gave his shoulders a shrug, and broke off.

But of a sudden he reached round and took a packet of letters from the tail pockets of his evening coat, and threw them to the stricken man.

"Carry those things to Lady Clavering and let her burn them with her own hands," he said. "They are letters which caused last night's crime—the letters of Mademoiselle Marise de Morcerf, a pretty schoolgirl, who wrote them in all innocence to Lieutenant Raynor out there in Malta, all those years ago. They were stolen by the man who was christened under the name of Anatole de Vellon, and died under that of Count Franz de Louvisan."

The General plucked up the letters with a wild sort of eagerness and sat forward in his chair, breathing hard.

"You know then, you know?" he said, in a shaking voice, the pallor on his face deepening until he

was absolutely ghastly. "Is there, then, no keeping anything from you, that you are able to unearth secrets such as this—things that no one but our two wretched selves knew in all the world? And you know how that man, that De Louvisan, had blackmailed her?"

"Yes, General, I know. But the source of my knowledge is by no means so miraculous as you seem to fancy. It came in part from those letters and in part from your guest, Lord St. Ulmer."

"St. Ulmer? St. Ulmer? What can he know of this? He is in no way concerned. He is little better than a stranger to me, despite his relationship to my wife."

"Nevertheless, he knows more than you fancy, General. He, too, was a visitor to Gleer Cottage last night. And he went, as you went, my friend, determined to be rid of the danger of Count Franz de Louvisan's tongue, even if he had to descend to crime to do it."

"St. Ulmer! St. Ulmer!" repeated the General with an air of bewilderment. "Why should he? What reason could he have for dreading the man?"

"A very good one, as you will see when I explain to you that St. Ulmer, as you call him, has no more right to the title than I myself!"

"An impostor!" gasped both the General and Mr. Narkom with one voice.

"Yes, an impostor," said Cleek quietly. "I recognized him directly I was able to get face to face

with him. He was known as Paul the Panther, though Paul Berton is his name, an Apache, a boon companion of Margot, the queen of the Apaches, and of Anatole de Villon, a cousin of the greatest scoundrel in Paris. This man Paul had been valet to the real Lord St. Ulmer, probably engaged in Paris, and went with him to the Argentine. With him also Paul took the effects and credentials of another Apache, Ferdinand Lovetski, the maker of that special blacking, 'Jetanola.' He had been killed for refusing to give up to the Apaches his little fortune, and accordingly, Anatole annexed it without the permission of Margot, and hence brought down on him her wrath. He managed to slip away with his master, and whether he had any hand in killing him in the Argentine, heaven alone knows. What is certain is that he decided to return to Europe and finally to England as Lord St. Ulmer, and in this he succeeded. The old solicitor had died. Both you and your wife had seen but little of St. Ulmer in later years, so that, armed with all the papers and his own quick wits, it was not so difficult as you would have imagined. Had it not been for the stray meeting with Anatole de Villon, who was himself masquerading here as the Count de Louvisan, all would have gone well. As it was, one rogue threatened the other, and De Louvisan held the trump cards. It was his plan to marry Lady Katharine, and St. Ulmer had to submit, for fear not only that he should be betrayed to the police as an impostor, but in case

Anatole should give him up to Margot. He played on Lady Katharine's feelings, therefore, so as to make her give up young Clavering and marry the count. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, at the last minute De Louvisan quarrelled with him; he had some other plans, he said, connected with letters——"

"Good heavens! I see now," gasped the General. "De Louvisan played a double game. Those letters were mine. He had contrived to steal them from me in Malta. There is really no harm in them, but Marise—Lady Clavering—and I, had fancied ourselves in love many years ago, and she was afraid, needlessly perhaps, that Sir Philip Clavering, who is the very soul of honour himself, would disown her and cut the friendship between him and myself. We had each found our true mates, and it was an unutterable shock to both to find that this wretch had threatened to inform Sir Philip, or else hand over the letters to Margot to publish at her will. I nearly went mad when Marise told me that she was going to meet him. I think I went off my head for a few minutes; at any rate, I did one of those unaccountable things for which people who have mental lapses are noted. It was after bedtime, long after, when the message arrived, and struck all my thoughts into a bewildering sort of chaos. I remember hanging up the receiver and turning to the door, but from that moment there is a blank until I found myself standing before the dressing mirror in my own room,

not in the act of disrobing, as I ought properly to have been doing at that hour and in that place, but dressing myself as if for dinner! I think you are aware of the fact that I use black cosmetic on my moustache, Mr. Cleek? When that mental lapse passed and I came to myself, there I was with my hair freshly combed and in the very act of applying the cosmetic to my moustache. I don't know how I got into the room or when—everything is a blank to me."

"A not unusual thing under the circumstances, General. These sudden shocks produce effects of that sort frequently. You were not really accountable, not really aware of what you did, or why—that, I suppose, is the explanation of how, when you came to think of going to the cottage and facing the man, you ran out of the house with the stick of cosmetic still in your hand. You did, did you not?"

"Yes, although I was not aware of it until I arrived at the place."

"Hum-m-m! So I imagined. And the A-string? How did you come to take that?"

"The A-string, Mr. Cleek?"

"Yes, the bit of catgut. Shall I be out in my reckoning, General, if I say that as you crept out of the house something fell either on your head or your hands, something which proved to be a long thick piece of catgut, and that, without realizing what you were doing, or why, you carried that, too, with you?"

"Good heavens, how do you know these things?

Nobody, nobody on God's earth could have told you that, Mr. Cleek, for no living soul was there. But that is exactly what did happen. When I got into the cottage and found Lady Clavering——"

"With a pink gauze petticoat under a pale green satin dress?"

"Yes. When I got there and found her in conversation with that wretch, why, those two things—the cosmetic and the catgut—were still in my hand. I had no use for them, of course, and as soon as I realized that I was holding them I threw them aside."

"So I supposed," said Cleek. "And the assassin found them there, although he *might* have had one of the articles upon his person; not likely, but he *might*, for he, too, uses it."

"The assassin?" The General looked at him sharply. "You know that, too? Who is he? What was his motive? Why did he spike that body to the wall?"

"We will come to that in good time, General," replied Cleek. "For the present let us stick to *your* connection with the case, please. After you had given your promise to Lady Clavering not to return to Gleer Cottage, why, may I ask, did you break it and go back?"

"I have told you in a measure, Mr. Cleek. I went back to make one last effort to move the man to pity. He must have been making use of the time for some purpose of his own, not counting upon my coming back, for as I returned to the house I caught

the distant sound of a hammer being used, and he was savagely out of temper when he saw me. Springing at me like a wild animal, he cried out: 'Spying, were you? Damn you, I'll brain you before you can give away what you saw. She shan't get shut of me that way; nor shall you!' I ducked down under the sweep of the blow he aimed at me, so that it whizzed past my head and the impetus of it carried him half round; then, as he wheeled and gathered himself for a second stroke, I half straightened and came at him with an upper cut that landed squarely on the peak of his jaw and carried him off his feet. He went up and over, and the back of his head landed against the edge of the mantelpiece and stunned him. He dropped like a log. I thought for the instant I had killed him, but a moment's examination convinced me that he was only stunned; indeed, was already showing signs of reviving; and I should certainly have stopped to see the matter out but that I was sure I heard somebody moving in the garden, so as quickly as I could, I got out and flew for dear life. I saw nobody and I heard nobody all the way back to this house, and you can guess my surprise when this morning brought news of the tragedy. I should have said to myself that I had killed the man had he been found as I left him; but when I not only heard, but went and saw for myself, that he had been found nailed to the wall and marked with mysterious figures, I knew that some one else had slain him; and life has been a nightmare of terror and suspense ever since."

"I can well believe it," said Cleek. "You have paid dearly for all your follies, General. But that is to be expected, for it is written, my friend, that he who breaks *must* pay. The laws of God are no more fixed in that respect than are the laws of man; and I, as the instrument of those man-made laws——" He shrugged his shoulders, and threw out both hands with a sweeping and expressive movement. "Murder has been done," he went on. "The law demands a life for a life, and my duty to the law is to hang the murderer of that man, even though the victim may have merited death twenty times over and the world be well rid of him. General"— he swung suddenly away from the chair against which he had all the time been leaning with his back to it and his face toward the room—"General, the law demands of the man-hunter that he shall be a thing of iron, cold, passionless, inflexible, a mere machine for the carrying out of its mandates, the probing of its riddles, the fulfilment of its retribution. It allows him to possess no private sentiments, to make no hero of a murderer, even though his crime be in the interest of others, and of itself brings good out of evil."

The General looked up at him, awed and silent. A strange and terrible impressiveness was in Cleek's voice.

"General," he went on after a brief pause, "the bringing to justice of the Count de Louvisan's murderer must inevitably entail the exposure of Lady Clavering's secret and yours. That I would

spare both you and her, if I could. The anguish you two have suffered I would let be the only thing that comes out of this crime if it were mine to say; but I am the instrument of the law, and I must obey its dictates. I cannot shield the assassin, and I cannot shield you or her ladyship if this case has to be brought up before the courts. General, I know the murderer and I know the motive. It was a great one, that I grant you; and the carrying of it out was one of craft and cunning.

"As you have guessed, it was Paul Berton, alias St. Ulmer, who committed both crimes; the killing of the keeper and De Louvisan. As you said just now, Anatole had been playing a double game, and he had threatened to throw over Lady Katharine and reveal the truth of the impostorship to Margot, thus earning his forgiveness from her for the stealing of that other property, and if possible marrying her and sharing her rule. St. Ulmer came to the cottage in those few minutes before you and Lady Clavering put in an appearance. He saw afterward what you did not see—namely, what De Louvisan did in those few minutes you were absent. He saw, too, that length of catgut which you dropped, and when you rushed out, leaving the man unconscious, Paul Berton, or St. Ulmer, flashed into the room, caught that up and strangled the fellow where he lay. He spiked him to the wall with the very hammer the hound had assailed you with, and he would have accomplished all he had set out to do but for an accident. De

Louvisan, or Anatole, had taken up a board and hidden the letters beneath the floor. Paul had seen him do it and meant to get them. But the noise he had made, he fancied, had attracted the attention of either a constable or a Common keeper, for he heard the sound of some one stealing through the garden. That was Lady Katharine Fordham walking in her sleep, poor girl. He had no time to lose, so caught up the stick of cosmetic you had dropped, and scrawled those figures on the dead man's shirt——"

"Their meaning, Cleek?" cried Narkom. "What was it?"

"A very simple one. Part of the Apache cipher. I remembered it afterward, and translated it thus:

2 X 4 X 1 X 2. Hiding X letters X Paul X Hiding

"You see he meant that if Margot should arrive on the scene, she should know that it was he, Paul, who had avenged the gang and hidden the letters. By this he meant to win his own pardon from Margot. As it happened, she had already taken fright and left the country. The numbers counted to nine, and I reckoned that Paul, noting this fact, must have trusted to luck to Margot being sharp enough to take it as a measurement of some kind. I took it to be nine boards, and was right, as you know.

"He would probably have gone back for the letters afterward, but he had no time; he fled across the Common, headlong into the arms of the Common

keeper, whom he shot at and knocked senseless, making use of the man's clothing, as we know. These he buried later in the old ruin, and there you will find them, General."

An exclamation burst from the lips of General Raynor, followed by the sound of something more startling, that of a pistol shot.

"God! What was that!" the General breathed in a frightened whisper at the sound of the explosion.

"The end of De Louvisan's murderer, General, I hope, and the everlasting shutting of the door on Lady Clavering's secret and yours," said Cleek. "Come quickly, before the servants arrive on the scene."

He led the way out of the room, and up the stairs to where was Lord St. Ulmer's room. Cleek opened the door with the key which had evidently reposed in his own pocket. A strange sight met their eyes. It was evident that St. Ulmer, or Paul Berton, had been left handcuffed and bound by ropes to the bedpost, but he had managed to evade his bondage sufficiently to get to a drawer in which must have been a loaded revolver, and he had thus set himself free.

"Let the dead past bury its dead," said Cleek quietly. "The world need only know that one impostor killed another, and finally shot himself when the law discovered the truth."

He bent down and swiftly removed the handcuffs from the still figure, and the General gave vent to a deep sigh of relief just as the startled servants came flocking up the staircase.

The riddle of the night had been solved, and their secret lay buried in the grave.

. . . . . .

It was an hour afterward. In the seclusion of the General's study, he and Narkom and Cleek sat talking over the events of the night.

"You must not accord me too much honour, General," said Cleek. "For after all I did not ferret out the entire truth until I came face to face with Paul Berton, who told me the facts, under force, it is true. It was, as I have already explained, he who killed the poor Common keeper when that unfortunate man interrupted his headlong dash for freedom. Then, General, borrowing a leaf from the book of a certain person known as the 'Vanishing Cracksman,' with whom he had had some dealings in other days, he leaped upon the unfortunate man, beat him to the ground, and hastily robbed him of his uniform. You know the rest: the assassin's blows were perhaps harder than he had intended, and so another life was added to the list. I confess I was puzzled at first by Lady Katharine's part in the affair and the ermine cloak, as I knew there were at least two women on the Common that night. But I managed to look into Mrs. Raynor's room in one of my rambles, and there I saw an ermine cloak soiled at the edges. The maid told me, unconscious of doing either harm or good, that she had just fetched it from Lady Katharine's room, as she had borrowed it a couple of days ago. I had already made up my mind after

overhearing a certain interview between the lovers, that Lady Katharine must have acquired the habit of walking in her sleep, and so that part of the mystery was made clear. But I am afraid I have given you an unpleasant time, General, and I have had to spy about a good deal. However, I think we may agree with the immortal Shakespeare that after all, "All's well that ends well."

He turned and put out his hand suddenly, and the General, with a little choking sound, put his own into it and breathed hard. There was a curious misty something lurking in his eyes.

Cleek smiled.

"Good-night!" he said softly, "and good-bye. Mr. Narkom and I will motor back to town, and perhaps on our way will make a point of calling at Clavering Close and break the news to Lady Katharine of her erstwhile father's death. She cannot grieve deeply, poor girl, for that which she has never known —a father's devotion, or a father's love; but it will end her suspense. Good-night, General, once more."

He waited a brief moment, and their eyes met in a look of perfect understanding; then with a nod to Narkom, who was standing in the background watching them, he spun on his heel and went out into the night whose riddle he had solved, leaving behind him that which is above all earthly things: a perfect peace and a still greater gratitude.

THE END

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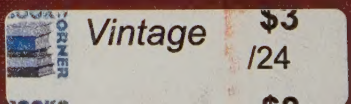
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